

Café Philosophy

Determinism

a. all events including human actions, volitions and choices are believed to be determined by preceding events and states of affairs

Free will

b. the apparent human ability to make choices that are not externally determined



Editorial

"Professor, do we have a free will, or are all our actions determined by our unconscious mind?"

Everyone would agree that people have preferences of their own and these at least influence what we do. However the question of free will seems to depend upon whether our choices are influenced or determined by these preferences.

A distinguished social psychologist, John A. Bargh in a recent book "Are We Free" frames this question as follows;

"Are our behaviors, judgments and other higher mental processes the product of free conscious choices, as **influenced** by internal psychological states (motives, preferences) or are those higher mental processes **determined** by those states." John then goes on to provide a metaphoric example of how this definition might be interpreted. "The influence model can be likened to an executive officer who takes suggestions from subordinates as to what to do but nonetheless makes the decisions; the determination model has those subordinates directly in charge with no need of an independent Decider.

Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson, believed that our personalities are essentially products of complexes and crises from upbringing. This

theory emerged as part of the script of the film musical *West Side Story* when the 'Jets' explained the situation of their upbringing to the local police sergeant;

"We're depraved on accounta we're deprived."

Dear Kindly Sergeant Krupke,
You gotta understand

It's just our bringing up-ke,
That gets us out of hand.

Our mothers all are junkies,
Our fathers all are drunks.

Golly Moses, naturally we're punks!

Determinism is described as the doctrine that every state of affairs, including every human event, act, and decision is the inevitable consequence of antecedent states of affairs. It could also be added that although these choices and decisions are made in full consciousness they may have been made beforehand by unconscious processes. What does this mean? An article in *Nature Neuroscience*, April 13th 2008) explains;

"Already several seconds before we consciously make a decision its outcome can be predicted from unconscious activity in the brain. This is shown in a study by scientists from the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences in Leipzig, in collaboration with the Charité University Hospital and the Bernstein Center for Computational Neuroscience in Berlin. The researchers from the group of Professor John-Dylan Haynes used a brain scanner to investigate what

happens in the human brain just before a decision is made. "Many processes in the brain occur automatically and without involvement of our consciousness. This prevents our mind from being overloaded by simple routine tasks. But when it comes to decisions we tend to assume they are made by our conscious mind. This is questioned by our current findings."

The feeling of free will is very real, just as real for those scientists who argue against its actual existence as for everyone else, but this strong feeling is based on an illusion, just as much as we experience the sun moving through the sky, when in fact it is we who are doing the moving.

The usefulness of the experience of conscious will is that it gives us something we can communicate to others—a feeling of doing something that we can tell the world what we believe we have done.

The people interviewed in this issue; Jasper, Ben, Katie, Tom and Sasha all believed they had free will and their decisions were made consciously. Tom even said that it made him feel happier to believe in free will despite the fact that causal evidence shows we are not the authors of our actions.

Rob Mason

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THE ADJUSTMENT BUREAU'S WILL, WON'T BE DONE

PHILOSOPHICAL FILMS

A MOVIE THAT FOCUSES ON THE BIG PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS OF FATE AND PRE-DESTINATION, FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM

IT RAISES QUESTIONS; AND BRINGS THESE THEMES AND PHILOSOPHICAL POINTS OUT INTO THE SPHERE OF POPULAR CULTURE, MAKING YOU THINK ABOUT THEM AS A MEANS TO FINDING

ANSWERS ABOUT YOUR OWN CREATIVITY AND PLACE IN LIFE.

(ASHLEY AT THE QUARTER CAFÉ, 27-31 DEGRAVES ST, MELBOURNE)



The Adjustment Bureau

through what seems a fraudulent device. If this is what it takes to create your own essence, some filmgoers may decide: "Rather him than me."

After all, though the movies may be sold on free will, the rest of us are perhaps less certain. We're well aware that to be the master of your fate can have its downside. We're happy enough to choose mocha over espresso, but prefer to leave our healthcare to the state. We expect applause for our achievements, but attribute our failures to the system. We like to think of our transgressions as caused less by our own knavery than by the wrong genes or maltreatment in childhood.

The Adjustment Bureau wants to tell us that our destiny is within our grasp. It hints, however, at a different message: **free will doesn't exist, and if it did, we wouldn't want it.**

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David Cox is a British film critic. He has also made programmes for ITV, the BBC and Channel 4, mainly about current affairs and history.

The question of whether or not human beings possess free will has kept philosophers out of mischief for millennia. The case for determinism may look neat, yet it's always been resisted. For if there's no free will, there's no moral responsibility and thus no basis for justice.

Accomplishments merit no praise, and love is devalued. Above all, our species loses the dignity we're so eager to accord it.

In this fight, Hollywood has had few doubts about which dog to back. After all, drama in which the antagonists were mere automatons would hardly be big box-office. Human triumph over the surly forces of destiny has therefore come to be favoured. Clint Eastwood's *Invictus* pretty much summed things up. "I am the master of my fate," it seemed to be telling us, and if you're not you're a wimp.

Now Matt Damon is back from Nelson Mandela's shadow to address the issue a little more thoughtfully. The Adjustment Bureau presents itself as yet another paean to free will, but this time the concept is contrasted with the alternative. It emerges less than wholly unscathed.

Somehow, Damon's David Norris must outrun his fate in a world in which human destiny is preordained. To create the scope for this, George Nolfi's reworking of a Philip K Dick story adopts the theological version of determinism, presumably because arranging for human agency to co-exist with a more straightforward variety would have been even more difficult.

Yet postulating an intelligence capable of shaping events only highlights familiar problems. Why, for example, should the controlling power have felt obliged to burden us mere mortals with our own supposed autonomy? In the film, as

elsewhere, it's to test our mettle. Why an entity capable of planning the future should feel required to run such trials remains a puzzle.

The film would have us believe that if David can just break free from a pre-scripted flowchart, he can shape his own destiny. Yet it can't help showing us that what he supposes to be his own urges already bear the imprint of biological, cultural and/or psychological determinism.

David seeks to evade his fate so he can carve out a future with Emily Blunt's Elise. Yet he didn't come by his desire for her through any choice of his own. Romantic love may be a product of pheromones, social conditioning or genetic predisposition, but by common consent it ruthlessly commandeers the hearts of those it ensnares. David could have resolved the problem with which he's presented if he'd been capable of willing himself to fall out of love with Elise, yet this is a freedom that remains denied to him.

David is invited to choose between love and career. However, he can make only one choice, because he's David. He hasn't made himself what he is; childhood experience together with parental example and perhaps hereditary traits are credited with much of this task. Meanwhile, Elise informs us that to be a great dancer you must be born with the right body. To bewitch a big-shot politician as dishevelled as David, you may well need much the same thing. In both of these characters' cases, willpower alone wouldn't have cut it; nurture and nature were calling the shots.

It's not just the feasibility of free will that's cast into doubt; even its desirability starts to look dodgy. David gets rewarded for choosing the dangers of self-realisation over the security of submission. Yet the terrors of the course he takes seem overwhelming; he has to be allowed to evade them



Rebecca and Luke provide their answers to the question: Are we Free or Determined?



The free will argument is complex and diverse. Both of us recognise that the debate about freedom can be responded to by arguing that we may be free and also determined.

Our debate will not attempt to cover all areas of this topic, but will simply offer two opposing answers to the question: 'Are we free or are we determined?'

Luke—Libertarianism The debate over free will has developed into a web of arguments and counter-arguments. On the one side we have philosophers such as René Descartes, who once described the will as "so free in its nature that it cannot be constrained." This view is called libertarianism. But in science, and unfortunately, in much of philosophy, the dogma of determinism – that our actions are causally determined by previous events – is more often assumed. I am for libertarianism.

Determinism is the view that we cannot decide, or even think, freely, however it may appear otherwise. We are instead constrained to act only as we are pre-ordained to act. Whether our will is dictated to us by an ordered universe, a chaotic universe, or God, depends upon which position you take.

Libertarianism is the opposite to determinism. It is outlined in its extreme form above by Descartes, but I wish to support a less radical position. I shall argue that it is immediately apparent to us that we are free, and that, while we may be pressured and bullied by our surroundings, it is clear that ultimately the choice is ours – and the responsibility also.

Morally Responsible; on first impressions, it appears that we have various capacities and abilities, and that it makes sense to apply certain terms to us, such as 'responsible', and 'accountable'. We seem to be morally responsible for

our actions, at least partly. But how can one hold someone responsible for their actions unless they are free to choose what to do? If we are completely determined in our actions, say by our surroundings, and thus have no real choice in the matter, we cannot validly be held responsible for our actions. But we are validly held responsible for our actions; therefore, it appears that we are free. And if we appear to be free, we must assume that we are free, until reason can show us otherwise. Indeed, Rebecca has a far harder job than she might at first imagine, for she must not just show that some of our choices are determined, but that all of our choices are determined. For if we have just one free choice, this is enough to say that free choice is a reality.

Rebecca: Let me first present what I take to be (roughly) our situation regarding freedom:

Our characters are determined by our genes, biology, environment, etc – all factors which are essentially beyond our control. We may take steps to change our situations, but this decision is a manifestation of characteristics in us which have been cultivated by the aforementioned factors: for instance, a decision to move house may be necessitated by one's socio-economic situation. Consequently, I assert that our 'choices' are in fact illusions of choice, and that we therefore do not have free will.

I suggest that every time we make a decision we could not have chosen differently if the situation was exactly the same, because every choice we make is for a reason; indeed a great number of reasons, only some we are conscious of. I hope that those advocating free will agree that we make choices for reasons, or their definition of free will must then entail arbitrary decisions. If we act according to our will, whether under the

libertarian or determinist conception, we surely must have reasons for our choices or else they are capricious. However, if our decisions are founded on reasons – reasons that are a product of our character and our environment – then if our character and situation remain constant, how could our decisions be different? For example, I buy a cake on my way to meet a friend. The libertarian might argue that I could have not done so. However, if I still have a partiality to cake, the right change in my pocket, feel hunger... The decision to buy the cake is determined by those factors. Luke might still argue that I could have not bought the cake: the decision was free and not determined. I could have acted otherwise. Yet how could he ever demonstrate this? Every time I make a decision I can never actualise the alternatives, so how could I ever know that those alternatives are not illusions?

Essentially, my argument is that our actions form part of a causal chain that operates ultimately on a sub-molecular level. At this level events are in fact deemed undetermined, ie purely random (at a sub-molecular level, quanta adopting one state rather than another is indeed undetermined, truly random): but this makes them no more free than if they were determined. Yet above the level of quantum pure randomness, every event has a cause. Every act is an event, and thus has a cause. These causes exist independently of the choosing agent and so cannot be influenced by the agent. Hence, the acts of each agent are caused (determined) by something beyond the agent's control.

Luke's view requires that there be a special category of agent causation: that we have free will which can act

(choose) independent of any influence. But what is this posited agent, the 'you' who makes choices freely? It is apparently not in any way determined by character – which is a sociological and biological phenomenon – or context. So in what way would this 'you' be grounded in anything at all, so that there continues to be something that is 'you'?

Luke argues that the burden of proof for determinism falls on my side because we appear to be free, and we often use words like 'freedom', 'responsibility' and 'choice'. It seems he assumes that these words must have real referents because they are used: poor logic. I argue instead that these words have an important role in our discourse, but the ambiguities that they contain essentially mask the fact that their concepts are not actually well-defined. What is responsibility? What is freedom? If we cannot say what it is, how can we claim it? In order for Luke to even successfully maintain that the obvious truth lies with the advocate of free will, he must be able to at least offer an adequate definition of the word 'freedom', and then explain how a special category of agent-causation works. I understand freedom as 'being able to act in another way'. But to me this does not mean being able to act in another way had one chosen to do so, because I believe that one would not choose to act differently were all the conditions the same.

Luke: Rebecca's argument appears to me to be in two parts. First, she seems to be saying that free will makes a nonsense of our actions, causing them to be meaningless and capricious. All actions, to be meaningful, must have reasons, and our actions are meaningful, and do have reasons. But, claims Rebecca, if our actions have reasons, they cannot be free!

Second, Rebecca claims that I hold a position which entails that we are free 'independent of any influence', and I know this because of our everyday language, which embraces freedom. This, she claims, is an insufficient reason for holding my opinion.

Before answering these objections, I feel I must clarify my position. I do not claim that we act entirely independently of any reasons or influence. I do not even hold to Descartes' view that the will is 'perfectly' free. We are not unqualifiedly free: we are influenced by our surroundings, our upbringing, and the facts presented to us

when we must make a decision. We are swayed by the circumstances. But ultimately, it is us who choose in which direction we sway. To define it further: we are self-causing agents – free and responsible.

Now let me respond to Rebecca's first objection; that without reasons (from which reasons determinism apparently follows) our actions would not be meaningful. We must distinguish between sufficient and insufficient conditions. A sufficient condition would be where the causes force the person to act in a particular way – there is no way it could have been different. An insufficient condition would be where there are causes, but they are not overwhelming – one could choose differently. In the words of William Hasker, "If you offer to sell me your old car, and I decide to accept, then your making the offer is certainly a condition of my accepting it, and it may qualify as a partial cause of my acceptance. But it is not a sufficient cause, because it does not necessitate my acceptance." This second 'insufficient conditions' form of reason allows for causes without determining the outcome. The action still has meaning, because we choose to make it on the basis of the facts presented. In fact, one may argue that if determinism, and thus 'sufficient conditions' were always the case, actions would not be meaningful, because there is not real choice behind them.

Rebecca's second objection is that simply because we use words like 'responsible' and 'free' in everyday talk does not mean that we are free. Look at my argument again, Rebecca. I did not say this. I simply argued that we appear to be morally responsible, and moral responsibility entails freedom. Furthermore, on 'the principle of credulity', we should accept as a starting point what undoubtedly appears to be the case. Therefore, as appears to be the case, we should say we are free, until Rebecca can show us otherwise. I do not need to say anything on the definition of freedom, apart to say that we are free to make choices. Nothing more needs to be said for the argument to be valid. And Rebecca so far has not lived up to the burden of proof for determinism.

Rebecca: In reply to Luke, I will again speak about the issue of language. Luke fails to clarify what he means by 'freedom'; by 'choice'; by 'responsibility'. These, I argue, are not words with clear definitions. How can Luke meaningfully state that we are free, but not be able to define what he means by this? He surely cannot show that we are free if he is unable to say clearly what freedom is. I don't even propose that he should answer why we are free, only how we are free: in what way we are free. If he cannot define freedom, then I challenge him to answer how it can be so apparent to him that we are free.

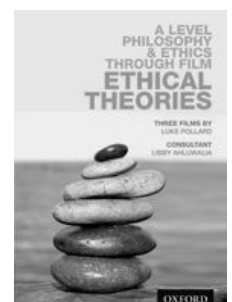
With regards to the issue of moral responsibility, I recognise that here a determinist like me faces many hard questions. If a person's actions are determined and could not be other than they are, then how may they be responsible? And if a person is not ultimately responsible, should they be rewarded/punished? I believe one's answer to these questions are almost invariably personal. My answer is that you are responsible for your actions insofar as those actions are your own, but that reward and punishment should be part of socialisation rather than retribution. However, this is more conjecture than conviction, and my main point to Luke would be that 'moral responsibility' is not necessarily a fact. The world still makes sense without this concept, even if this does not concord with the way many people think. What reason do we have to believe in freedom or moral responsibility other than an inclination rooted in our psychological and cultural evolution?

This dialogue first appeared in the U.K philosophy magazine; *Philosophy Now*.

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Rebecca works in London with the Three Faiths Forum as a Mentoring Projects Officer.

Luke produces educational philosophy DVDs. Curriculum-focused films with accompanying exam board-specific worksheets, tackling topics for A Level Philosophy and Ethics students.





'Luck swallows everything'

by Galen Strawson

Are we free agents? Can we be morally responsible for what we do? Philosophers distinguish these questions and have all the answers. Some say YES and YES (we are fully free, and wholly morally responsible for what we do). Others say YES and NO (certainly we are free agents - but we cannot be ultimately responsible for what we do). A third group says NO and NO (we are not free agents at all; a fortiori we cannot be morally responsible). A strange minority says NO and YES (we can be morally responsible for what we do even though we are not free agents). This view is rare, but it has a kind of existentialist panache, and appears to be embraced by Wintergreen in Joseph Heller's novel *Closing Time* (1994), as well as by some Protestants.

Who is right? Suppose that tomorrow is a holiday, and that you are wondering what to do. You can climb a mountain or read Lao Tzu. You can restring your mandolin or go to the zoo. At the moment you are reading about free will. You are free to go on reading or stop now. You have started on this sentence, but you don't have to finish it. Right now, as so often in life, you have a number of options. Nothing forces your hand. Surely you are entirely free to choose what to do, and responsible for what you do?

This is what the Compatibilists think. They say YES and YES, and are very influential in the present day. Their name derives from their claim that free will is entirely compatible with determinism - the view that everything that happens in the universe is necessitated by what has already gone before, in such a way

that nothing can happen otherwise than it does. Free will, they think, is just a matter of not being constrained or compelled in certain ways that have nothing to do with whether determinism is true or false. 'Consider yourself at this moment', they say. 'No one is holding a gun to your head. You are not being threatened or manhandled. You are not (surely) drugged, or in chains, or subject to a psychological compulsion like kleptomania, or a post-hypnotic command. So you are wholly free. This is what being a free agent is. It's wholly irrelevant that your character is determined, if indeed it is.'

'And although things like guns and chains, threats to the life of your children, psychological obsessions, and so on, are standardly counted as constraints that can limit freedom and responsibility, there is another and more fundamental sense in which you are fully free in any situation in which you can choose or act in any way at all - in any situation in which you are not panicked, or literally compelled to do what you do, in such a way that it is not clear that you can still be said to choose or act at all (as when you press a button because your finger is forced down onto it). Consider pilots of hijacked aeroplanes. They usually stay calm. They choose to comply with the hijackers' demands. They act responsibly, as we naturally say. They are able to do other than they do, but they choose not to. They do what they most want to do, all things considered, in the circumstances in which they find themselves; and all circumstances limit one's options in some way. Some circumstances limit one's options much more drastically than

others, but it doesn't follow that one isn't free to choose in those circumstances. Only literal compulsion, panic, or uncontrollable impulse really removes one's freedom to choose, and to (try to) do what one most wants to do given one's character or personality. Even when one's finger is being forced down on the button, one can still act freely in resisting the pressure or cursing one's oppressor, and in many other ways.'

So most of us are wholly free to choose and act throughout our waking lives, according to the Compatibilists. We are free to choose between the options we perceive to be open to us. (Sometimes we would rather not face options, but are unable to avoid awareness of the fact that we do face them.) One has options even when one is in chains, or falling through space. Even if one is completely paralysed, one is still free in so far as one is free to choose to think about one thing rather than another. There is, as Sartre observed, a sense in which we are condemned to freedom, not free not to be free.

One may well not be able to do everything one wants - one may want to fly unassisted, vapourize every gun in the United States by an act of thought, or house all those who sleep on the streets of Calcutta by the end of the month - but few have supposed that free will is a matter of being able to do everything one wants. It is, doubtless, a possible view. But according to the Compatibilists, free will is simply a matter of being unconstrained in such a way that one has genuine options and opportunities for action, and is able to choose between them according to what one wants or thinks best. It doesn't matter if one's character, personality, preferences, and general motivational

set are entirely determined by things for which one is in no way responsible - by one's genetic inheritance, upbringing, historical situation, chance encounters, and so on.

Even dogs count as free agents, on this view. So Compatibilists have to explain what distinguishes us from dogs - since we don't think that dogs are free in the way we are. Many of them say that it is our capacity for explicitly self-conscious thought. Not because self-consciousness liberates anyone from determinism: if determinism is true, one is determined to have whatever self-conscious thoughts one has, whatever their complexity. The idea is that self-consciousness makes it possible for one to be explicitly aware of oneself as facing choices and engaging in processes of reasoning about what to do, and thereby constitutes one as a radically free agent in a way unavailable to any unself-conscious agent. One's self-conscious deliberative presence in the situation of choice simply trumps the fact - if it is a fact - that one is, in the final analysis, wholly constituted as the sort of person one is by factors for which one is not in any way ultimately responsible.

Some Compatibilists add that human beings are sharply marked off from dogs by their capacity to act for reasons that they explicitly take to be moral reasons. Compatibilism has many variants. According to Harry Frankfurt's version, for example, one has free will if one wants to be moved to action by the motives that do in fact move one to action. On this view, freedom is just a matter of having a personality that is harmonious in a certain way.

The Compatibilists, then, say YES and YES, and those who want to say YES and YES are well advised to follow them, for determinism is un-falsifiable, and may be true. (In the end, contemporary physics gives us no more reason to suppose that determinism is false than to suppose that it is true.) Many, however, think that the Compatibilist account of things does

not even touch the real problem of free will. For what is it, they say, to define freedom in such a way that it is compatible with determinism? It is to define it in such a way that an agent can be a free agent even if all its actions throughout its life are determined to happen as they do by events that have taken place before it is born: so that there is a clear sense in which it could not at any point in its life have done otherwise than it did. This, they say, is certainly not free will or moral responsibility. How can one be truly or ultimately morally responsible for what one does if everything one does is ultimately a deterministic outcome of events for whose occurrence one is in no way responsible?

These are the In-compatibilists, and they divide into two groups: the Libertarians, on the one hand, and the No-Freedom theorists or Pessimists, on the other. The Libertarians are up-beat. They say YES and YES, and think the Compatibilists' account of freedom can be improved on. They hold (1) that we do have free will, and (2) that free will is not compatible with determinism, and (3) that determinism is therefore false. But they face an extremely difficult task: they have to show how indeterminism (the falsity of determinism) can help with free will, and in particular with moral responsibility.

The Pessimists do not think this can be shown. They agree that free will is not compatible with determinism, but deny that indeterminism can help. They think that free will, of the sort that is necessary for genuine moral responsibility, is provably impossible. They say NO and NO. They begin by granting what everyone must. They grant that there is a clear, important, compatibilist sense in which we can be free agents (we can be free, when unconstrained, to choose and to do what we want or think best, given how we are). But they insist that this isn't enough: it doesn't give us what we want, in the way of free will. Nor does it give us

what we believe we have. But (they continue) it is not as if the Compatibilists have missed something. The truth is that nothing can give us what we think we want, and ordinarily think we have. We cannot be morally responsible, in the absolute, buck-stopping way in which we often unreflectively think we are. We cannot have 'strong' free will of the kind that we would need to have, in order to be morally responsible in this way.

One way of setting out the Pessimists' argument is as follows:

(1) When you act, you do what you do, in the situation in which you find yourself, because of the way you are.

But then

(2) To be truly or ultimately morally responsible for what you do, you must be truly or ultimately responsible for the way you are, at least in certain crucial mental respects. (Obviously you don't have to be responsible for your height, age, sex, and so on.)

But

(3) You can't be ultimately responsible for the way you are in any respect at all, so you can't be ultimately responsible for what you do.

For

(4) To be ultimately responsible for the way you are, you must have somehow intentionally brought it about that you are the way you are.

And the problem is then this. Suppose

(5) You have somehow intentionally brought it about that you are the way you now are, in certain mental respects: suppose you have brought it about that you have a certain mental nature Z, in such a way that you can be said to be ultimately responsible for Z.

For this to be true

(6) You must already have had a certain mental nature Y, in the light of which you brought it about that you now have Z. If you didn't already have a mental nature then you didn't have any intentions or preferences, and can't be responsible for the way you now are, even if you have changed.)

But then

(7) For it to be true that you are ultimately responsible for how you now are, you must be ultimately responsible for having had that nature, Y, in the light of which you brought it about that you now have Z.

So

(8) You must have brought it about that you had Y.

But then

(9) you must have existed already with a prior nature, X, in the light of which you brought it about that you had Y, in the light of which you brought it about that you now have Z.

And so on. Here one is setting off on a potentially infinite regress. In order for one to be truly or ultimately responsible for how one is in such a way that one can be truly responsible for what one does, something impossible has to be true: there has to be, and cannot be, a starting point in the series of acts of bringing it about that one has a certain nature; a starting point that constitutes an act of ultimate self-origination.

There is a more concise way of putting the point: in order to be ultimately responsible, one would have to be *causa sui* - the ultimate cause or origin of oneself, or at least of some crucial part of one's

mental nature. But nothing can be ultimately *causa sui* in any respect at all. Even if the property of being *causa sui* is allowed to belong unintelligibly to God, it cannot plausibly be supposed to be possessed by ordinary finite human beings. 'The *causa sui* is the best self-contradiction that has been conceived so far', as Nietzsche remarked in 1886:

it is a sort of rape and perversion of logic. But the extravagant pride of man has managed to entangle itself profoundly and frightfully with just this nonsense. The desire for 'freedom of the will' in the superlative metaphysical sense, which still holds sway, unfortunately, in the minds of the half-educated; the desire to bear the entire and ultimate responsibility for one's actions oneself, and to absolve God, the world, ancestors, chance, and society involves nothing less than to be precisely this *causa sui* and, with more than Baron Münchhausen's audacity, to pull oneself up into existence by the hair, out of the swamps of nothingness. . .

In fact, nearly all of those who believe in strong free will do so without any conscious thought that it requires ultimate self-origination. But self-origination is the only thing that could actually ground the kind of strong free will that is regularly believed in.

The Pessimists' argument may seem contrived, but essentially the same argument can be given in a more natural form as follows. (A) One is the way one is, initially, as a result of heredity and early experience. (B) These are clearly things for which one cannot be held to be in any way responsible (this might not be true if there were reincarnation, but this would just shift the problem backwards). (C) One cannot at any later stage of one's life hope to accede to ultimate responsibility for the way one is by trying to change the way one already is as a result of heredity and experience. For one may well try to change oneself, but (D) both the particular way in which one is moved to

try to change oneself, and the degree of one's success in one's attempt at change, will be determined by how one already is as a result of heredity and experience. And (E) 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. (F) This may not be the whole story, for it may be that some changes in the way one is are traceable to the influence of indeterministic or random factors. But (G) it is absurd to suppose that indeterministic or random factors, for which one is *ex hypothesi* in no way responsible, can in themselves contribute to one's being truly or ultimately responsible for how one is.

The claim, then, is not that people cannot change the way they are. They can, in certain respects (which tend to be exaggerated by North Americans and underestimated, perhaps, by members of other cultures). The claim is only that people cannot be supposed to change themselves in such a way as to be or become ultimately responsible for the way they are, and hence for their actions. One can put the point by saying that in the final analysis the way you are is, in every last detail, a matter of luck - good or bad.

Philosophers will ask what exactly this 'ultimate' responsibility is supposed to be. They will suggest that it doesn't really make sense, and try to move from there to the claim that it can't really be what we have in mind when we talk about moral responsibility. It is very clear to most people, however, and one dramatic way to characterize it is by reference to the story of heaven and hell: it is responsibility of such a kind that, if we have it, it makes sense to propose that it could be just to punish some of us with torment in hell and reward others with bliss in heaven. It makes sense because what we do is absolutely up to us. The words 'makes sense' are stressed because one doesn't have to believe in the story of

heaven and hell in order to understand the notion of ultimate responsibility that it is used to illustrate. Nor does one have to believe in it in order to believe in ultimate responsibility (many atheists have done so).

The story is useful because it illustrates the kind of absolute or ultimate responsibility that many have supposed - and do suppose - themselves to have. (Another way to characterize it is to say that it exists if punishment and reward can be fair without having any pragmatic - or indeed aesthetic - justification.) But one doesn't have to appeal to it when describing the sorts of everyday situation that are primarily influential in giving rise to our belief in ultimate responsibility. Suppose you set off for a shop on the evening of a national holiday, intending to buy a cake with your last ten pound note. Everything is closing down. There is one cake left; it costs ten pounds. On the steps of the shop someone is shaking an Oxfam tin. You stop, and it seems completely clear to you that it is entirely up to you what you do next: you are truly, radically free to choose, in such a way that you will be ultimately responsible for whatever you do choose. You can put the money in the tin, or go in and buy the cake, or just walk away. You are not only completely free to choose. You are not free not to choose.

Standing there, you may believe determinism is true: you may believe that in five minutes time you will be able to look back on the situation you are now in and say, of what you will by then have done, 'It was determined that I should do that'. But even if you do wholeheartedly believe this, it does not seem to touch your current sense of the absoluteness of your freedom and moral responsibility.

One diagnosis of this phenomenon is that one can't really believe that determinism is true, in such situations, and also can't help thinking that its falsity might make freedom possible. But the feeling of ultimate responsibility seems to remain

inescapable even if this is not so. Suppose one fully accepts the Pessimists' argument that no one can be *causa sui*, and that one has to be *causa sui* (in certain crucial mental respects) in order to be ultimately responsible for one's actions. This does not seem to have any impact on one's sense of one's radical freedom and responsibility, as one stands there, wondering what to do. One's radical responsibility seems to stem simply from the fact that one is fully conscious of one's situation, and knows that one can choose, and believes that one action is morally better than the other. This seems to be immediately enough to confer full and ultimate responsibility. And yet it cannot really do so, according to the Pessimists. For whatever one actually does, one will do what one does because of the way one is, and the way one is is something for which one neither is nor can be responsible, however self-consciously aware of one's situation one is. The Pessimists' argument is hard to stomach (even Hitler is let off the hook), and one challenge to it runs as follows. 'Look, the reason why one can be ultimately responsible for what one does is that one's self is, in some crucial sense, independent of one's general mental nature (character or motivational structure). Suppose one faces a difficult choice between A, doing one's moral duty, and B, following one's desires. You Pessimists describe this situation as follows: Given one's mental nature, you say, one responds in a certain way. One is swayed by reasons for and against both A and B. One tends towards A or B, and in the end one does one or the other, given one's mental nature, which is something for which one cannot be ultimately responsible. But this description of yours forgets the self - it forgets what one might call 'the agent-self'. As an agent-self, one is in some way independent of one's mental nature. One's mental nature inclines one to do one thing rather than another, but it does not thereby necessitate one to do one thing rather than the other (to use Leibniz's

terms). As an agent-self, one incorporates a power of free decision that is independent of all the particularities of one's mental nature in such a way that one can after all count as ultimately morally responsible in one's decisions and actions even though one is not ultimately responsible for any aspect of one's mental nature.'

The Pessimists are unimpressed: 'Even if one grants the validity of this conception of the agent-self for the sake of argument', they say, 'it cannot help. For if the agent-self decides in the light of the agent's mental nature but is not determined by the agent's mental nature, the following question immediately arises: Why does the dear old agent-self decide as it does? The general answer is clear. Whatever it decides, it decides as it does because of the overall way it is, and this necessary truth returns us to where we started: somehow, the agent-self is going to have to get to be responsible for being the way it is, in order for its decisions to be a source of ultimate responsibility. But this is impossible: nothing can be *causa sui* in the required way. Whatever the nature of the agent-self, it is ultimately a matter of luck. Maybe the agent-self decides as it does partly or wholly because of the presence of indeterministic occurrences in the decision process. Maybe, maybe not. It makes no difference, for indeterministic occurrences can never contribute to ultimate moral responsibility.'

Some think they can avoid this debate by asserting that free will and moral responsibility are just a matter of being governed by reason - or by Reason with a dignifying capital 'R'. But being governed by Reason can't be the source of ultimate responsibility. It can't be a property that makes punishment ultimately just or fair

for those who possess it, and unfair for those who don't. For to be morally responsible, on this view, is simply to possess one sort of motivational set among others. But if you do possess this motivational set then you are simply lucky - if it is indeed a good thing - while those who lack it are unlucky.

This will be denied. It will be said, truly, that some people struggle to become more morally responsible, and make an enormous effort. Their moral responsibility is then not a matter of luck: it is their own hard won achievement. The Pessimists' reply is immediate. 'Suppose you are someone who struggles to be morally responsible, and make an enormous effort. Well, that too is a matter of luck. You are lucky to be someone who has a character of a sort that disposes you to make that sort of effort. Someone who lacks a character of that sort is merely unlucky.'

In the end, luck swallows everything: This is one (admittedly contentious) way of putting the point that there can be no ultimate responsibility, given the natural, strong conception of responsibility that was characterized by reference to the story of heaven and hell. Relative to that conception, no punishment or reward is ever ultimately just or fair, however natural or useful or otherwise humanly appropriate it may be or seem.

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? 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?

One reason for the belief has already been given: it has to do with the way we experience choice, as self-conscious agents confronting the Oxfam box and the cake. And this raises the interesting question whether all self-conscious agents who face choices and are fully self-consciously aware of the fact that they do so must experience themselves as having strong free will, or as being radically self-determining? We human beings cannot experience our choices as determined, even if determinism is true, but perhaps this is a human peculiarity, not an inescapable feature of any possible self-conscious agent. And perhaps it is not even universal among human beings: Krishnamurti claims that 'a truly intelligent [spiritually advanced] mind simply cannot have choice' because it 'can . . . only choose the path of truth . . . Only the unintelligent mind has free will,' and a related thought is expressed by Saul Bellow in *Humboldt's Gift*: 'In the next realm, where things are clearer, clarity eats into freedom. We are free on earth because of cloudiness,

because of error, because of marvellous limitation.' Spinoza extends the point to God, who cannot, he says, 'be said . . . to act from freedom of the will'.

Other causes of our belief in strong free will have been suggested, apart from the cake and the Oxfam box. Hume stresses our experience of indecision. Kant holds that our experience of moral obligation makes belief in strong free will inevitable. P. F. Strawson argues that our belief in freedom is grounded in certain fundamental natural reactions to other people - such as gratitude and resentment - that we cannot hope to give up. Those who think hard about free will are likely to conclude that the complex moral psychology of the experience of freedom is the most fruitful area of research. New generations, however, will continue to launch themselves onto the old carousel, and the debate is likely to continue for as long as human beings can think, as the Pessimists' argument that we can't possibly have strong free will keeps bumping into the fact that we can't help believing that we do.

The facts are clear, and they have been known for a long time. When it comes to the metaphysics of free will, André Gide's remark is apt: 'Everything has been said before, but since nobody listens we have to keep going back and beginning all over again.' It seems the only freedom that we can have is Compatibilist freedom. If - since - that is not enough for ultimate responsibility, we cannot have ultimate responsibility.

The debate continues, and some have thought that philosophy ought to move on. There is little reason to expect that it will, as new minds are seduced by the problem. And yet the facts are clear. One cannot be ultimately responsible for one's character or mental nature in any way at all.



There once was an old man who
said,

"Damn!
It is borne in upon me I am
An engine that moves
In determinate grooves,
I'm not even a bus, I'm a tram."
—Maurice Hare, "Limerick" (1905)

Although very short, this poem seems to sum up the free will/determinism debate, are you a bus or a tram? Do you have free will or are your actions determined?

I met Katie and Tom sitting on the grass near the corner of Flinders St. and Swanston St. close to Federation Square, Melbourne. They told me they were on holiday from Leeds in the U.K. I asked Katie first whether she believed in Free will and she emphatically told me that she did and said that everyone had the choice to take their life wherever they wanted to. In other words she did not wholly agree with Maurice Hare above

that she might be a like a 'Melbourne' tram.

Tom (with a distinctly Liverpudlian—John Lennon accent) was of a slightly different opinion saying that there were possibly some biological reasons for some of the decisions that he made but he went on to say that he liked the idea of believing in Free will because it made him happier. This could be another way of saying that he had a strong subjective feeling of having free will. But why is this? Spinoza put it like this "men believe themselves to be free, simply because they are conscious of their actions, and unconscious of the causes whereby those actions are determined."

We then discussed the subject of moral responsibility. I asked Katie whether she thought that offenders should be punished or rehabilitated.

Although Katie did believe that rehabilitation was the best way to

stop re-offending. She mentioned that the whole question of rehabilitation was a big thing in the U.K right now but the main problem was the lack of money. She commented that incarceration is not meant to be fun, but a combination of strict sentencing guidelines and budget shortfalls has made today's prisons much more unpleasant--and much less likely to rehabilitate their inhabitants--than in the past. Nonetheless Katie did believe that rehabilitation was the best way to stop re-offending.

Tom said that some offenders would not respect rehabilitation and he felt that there should be some form of deterrent when dealing with crime. He went on to suggest that the best way would be to have both a rehabilitation and punishment programme to accommodate different kinds of offenders.

*Katie and Tom's comments were
recorded by Rob Mason.*



In a recent book entitled “Are We Free” John Baer provides a definition of determinism;

“Determinism is a theory or belief that events, including acts of the will, occurrences in nature, and social or psychological phenomena, are causally determined by preceding events and natural laws. Determinism assumes that all events in the universe, including all the things that happen in human minds, follow laws of causality.” Refer, <http://users.rider.edu/~baer/Ch16Baer.pdf>

John also comments in the same chapter that; “although human reasoning influences our decisions and actions it is also determined by things that have come before—by what we know, by the people we’ve known, by some genetic factors that influence how we go about reasoning.” In essence our actions are determined by prior events just like everything else in the universe. These are strong words and we decided to find out from two philosophically minded café patrons whether they agreed with what John is suggesting.

We went to the “Journal” café at 253 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, where we met Jasper (left) and Ben (right). We are asked them both the question of whether they thought their actions and volitions were the result of their free will or whether they were more like automatons whose decisions to act

were determined by prior events.

I asked Jasper whether he believed his actions and volitions were determined or whether they were free.

Jasper replied; We interpret people as either largely determined or as independent thinkers.

He also said that he agreed that his actions were influenced by past events and then quoted Nietzsche by saying that freedom is a myth. He commented that it was important that one believes that one is the agent of one’s actions even though they may be mostly determined.

I then asked Ben what his thoughts were and he replied; that he did not think that all his actions were determined. He then said his dispositions were influenced by DNA and upbringing but he felt that we still have a free will to make choices within those pre-dispositions.

He then provided an example by commenting that people emerge from the same environment with totally different perspectives. He felt convinced that there is an element of free will



Who's in Charge?: Free Will and the Science of the Brain, University of California, Santa Barbara cognitive neuroscientist Michael Gazzaniga sets off in search of free will. Are our actions determined solely by physical processes, or is the mind its own master? This age-old philosophical conundrum gets a terrific, if ultimately indecisive, analysis in this engrossing study of the mechanics of thought.

Café Philosophy nights for students
The association of Philosophy teachers (www.nzapt.net) runs a series of "Café Philosophy" nights for students across Christchurch. The sessions are well-attended, attracting over 30 students, and usually discussion-based. The format usually involves a brief introduction to a topic after which a facilitated discussion takes place. The feedback from participants is overwhelmingly positive, and in 2012 they intend to run sessions monthly. Café Philosophy events are promoted through schools and on their website: www.certaindoubt.org.



Café Philosophy News
reported by Paula Tan

Philosophy Discussion Group

I recently attended a Philosophy Discussion Group at the Time Out Bookstore in Mt. Eden, led and organised by Dr. Bill Cooke.

The discussion group is usually held on the last Tuesday of each month between 7pm and 8.30pm.



The topic for discussion was Plato's masterpiece, "The Republic", in which he sets out his ideas for a utopian political system. "The Republic" is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of Western Philosophy. Presented in the form of a dialogue between three interlocutors, it is an inquiry into the notion of a perfect community and the ideal individual within it.

It was a lively discussion with much participation from those attending. "It's more than a dialogue, it's a conversation," said Bill Cooke.

Issues discussed were primarily related to the central question in The Republic – is it best to be just or unjust? They included democracy, universal suffrage and the recent New Zealand elections.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 21st and the book to be discussed is "Civilisation" by Niall Ferguson.

Neuroscience, free will and determinism: 'I'm just a machine'

Our bodies can be controlled by outside forces in the universe, discovers Tom Chivers. So where does that leave free will? By Tom Chivers (This article first appeared in 'The Telegraph' on 12 Oct 2011)

For a man who thinks he's a robot, Professor Patrick Haggard is remarkably cheerful about it. "We certainly don't have free will," says the leading British neuroscientist. "Not in the sense we think." It's quite a way to start an interview.

We're in the Institute for Cognitive Neuroscience, in Queen Square in London, the nerve centre – if you will – of British brain research. Prof Haggard is demonstrating "transcranial magnetic stimulation", a technique that uses magnetic coils to affect one's brain, and then to control the body. One of his research assistants, Christina Fuentes, is holding a loop-shaped paddle next to his head, moving it fractionally. "If we get it right, it might cause something." She presses a switch, and the coil activates with a click. Prof Haggard's hand twitches. "It's not me doing that," he assures me, "it's her."

The machinery can't force Prof Haggard to do anything really complicated – "You can't make me sign my name," he says, almost ruefully – but at one point, Christina is able to waggle his index finger slightly, like a schoolmaster. It's very fine control, a part of the brain specifically in command of a part of the body. "There's quite a detailed map of the brain's wiring to the body that you can build," he tells me.

I watch as Christina controls Prof Haggard's fingers like a marionette. The mechanical nature of it is unsettling. A graph on a screen shows his muscle activity plotted by time; 20 milliseconds after she clicks the button, it depicts an elegant leap and drop, like a heartbeat on an ECG. That 20 milliseconds is how

long it takes for the signal to travel down his nerves. "The conduction time would be less from my jaw muscles, more from my leg muscles," he says. And as many of us will recognise, the process gets less effective as we age: "As I get older, the curve will move slowly to the right on the graph."

The idea that our bodies can be controlled by an outside force is a pretty astonishing one. "This is absolutely out of my control," insists Prof Haggard, as his muscles continue to move. "I'm not doing it, Christina is. I'm just a machine, and she is operating me."

What does this mean in terms of free will? "We don't have free will, in the spiritual sense. What you're seeing is the last output stage of a machine. There are lots of things that happen before this stage – plans, goals, learning – and those are the reasons we do more interesting things than just waggle fingers. But there's no ghost in the machine."

The conclusions are shocking: if we are part of the universe, and obey its laws, it's hard to see where free will comes into it. What we think of as freedom, he says, is a product of complexity. "An amoeba has one input, one output. If you touch it with one chemical, it engulfs it; with another, it recoils.

If you see a light go green, it may mean press the accelerator; but there are lots of situations where it doesn't mean that: if the car in front hasn't moved, for example. The same stimulus sometimes makes me press the accelerator, but sometimes the horn. We are not one output-one input beings; we have to cope with a messy world of inputs, an enormous range of outputs. I think the term 'free will' refers to the complexity of that

arrangement."

Slowly, however, we are learning more about the details of that complexity. This, Prof Haggard says, has profound implications: philosophically, morally, and – most worryingly – legally. "We understand what brain areas are responsible for impulsive behaviour, and which bits are responsible for inhibiting that behaviour. There's a whole brain network associated with holding back from things you shouldn't do.

"What happens if someone commits a crime, and it turns out that there's a lesion in that brain area? Is that person responsible? Is the damage to the machine sufficient for us to exempt them from that very basic human idea that we are responsible for our actions? I don't know." He refers to a major project in America, where "lawyers, neuroscientists, philosophers and psychiatrists are all trying to work out what impact brain science has on our socio-legal sense of responsibility".

This runs contrary to the sense of freedom that we feel in terms of controlling our actions, on which we base our whole sense of self and system of morality. "As far as I know," says Prof Haggard, "all societies hold individuals responsible for their actions. Even in animal societies, individuals have reputations. Non-human primates adjust their behaviour according to how other animals will respond. Junior males will not steal from older males, because they know they'll get beaten up. That's the beginning of social responsibility; the awareness that your behaviour has effects on the behaviour of others, and can have good or bad consequences.

It's a rule that we need to have as social animals. You couldn't have society unless, if you do something

wrong, you pay for it. The question is, what do we do when people don't have the brain machinery to play by the rules – or decide not to play by them? That's not a scientific question. That's a moral one."

Maybe, I suggest, we've over-defined free will. Perhaps it doesn't exist in the mystical breaking-the-laws-of-the-universe way, but there is a sense in which this "me", this brain and body, responds to the world, reacts to information, tries to shape its environment; takes decisions. Can we not pull free will back to something more defensible? He taps his fingers.

"Yes, interacting intelligently with your environment might be enough. The philosophical definition of free will uses the phrase 'could have done otherwise'. I picked up the blue cup; could I have picked up the white one? Given the initial conditions, the world as it was, could I have acted differently?

"As a neuroscientist, you've got to be a determinist. There are physical laws, which the electrical and chemical events in the brain obey. Under identical

circumstances, you couldn't have done otherwise; there's no 'I' which can say 'I want to do otherwise'. It's richness of the action that you do make, acting smart rather than acting dumb, which is free will."

Some philosophers – Robert Kane, and, famously, Karl Popper and John Eccles – have held out hope that quantum indeterminacy, the randomness at the level of the universe's finest grains, could rescue true freedom.

Prof Haggard is dismissive. "No one wants to be told they're just a machine. But there is simply nothing approaching convincing evidence for the quantum view. Popper and Eccles proposed that free will was due to quantum indeterminacy in the chemical messages that communicate between neurons.

"But none of that happens at the quantum level. From a physics point of view, it's macro-level." Besides, quantum activity is purely random, and randomness gives you no more freedom than determinism does.

Does this bother you, I ask? Being a machine? "I keep my personal and professional lives pretty separate," he says, smiling. "I still seem to decide what films I go to see, I don't feel it's predestined, though it must be determined somewhere in my brain.

"There's an idea in theology that our free will places us next to God. Milton describes this beautifully in *Paradise Lost*. We like to think we're wonderful, that we have this marvellous capacity. But we should be more impartial: perhaps we overestimate the value and the excitement of having free will."

On that note, I take my leave. Although really, I didn't have any choice.

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Let us consider this waiter in the cafe. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. All his behaviour seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at being a waiter in a cafe. There are indeed many precautions to imprison a man in what he is, as if we lived in perpetual fear that he might escape from it, that he might break away and suddenly elude his condition.

Jean-Paul Sartre "Being and Nothingness"



Barista and waiter at the Brunetti Café, 214 Flinders Lane, Melbourne

Photo by Rob Mason



Are We Free? Psychology and Free Will

John Baer, James C. Kaufman, and Roy F. Baumeister (eds.)

New York: Oxford University Press ISBN 978-0-19-518963-6

REVIEWED BY SVEN WALTER

Free will used to be a problem best left to philosophers who, after all, make their living trying to solve the unsolvable. Things started to change when Benjamin Libet discovered that simple motor actions are preceded by a readiness potential starting 350ms before the subject is consciously aware of an 'urge' to 'voluntary' action; during the past 25 years, neuroscientific research has been thought relevant to the free will debate.

Simplifying somewhat, neuroscientists are claiming that free will is impossible because our actions originate in our brains, and our brains are deterministic causal systems. Philosophers respond that this is a category mistake because freedom is to be found in the realm of mental reasons, not in the realm of physical causes. The neuroscientists in turn point out that, since reasons can make a difference only via deterministic neurophysiological processes, the philosophers' suggestion is of little help. Recently, social psychologists like Daniel Wegner have joined this melee, arguing that, since the feeling of will-fully doing something can be separated from the act of willfully doing something, the former is an 'illusion' and not a reliable indicator of an authoritative free agent or self.

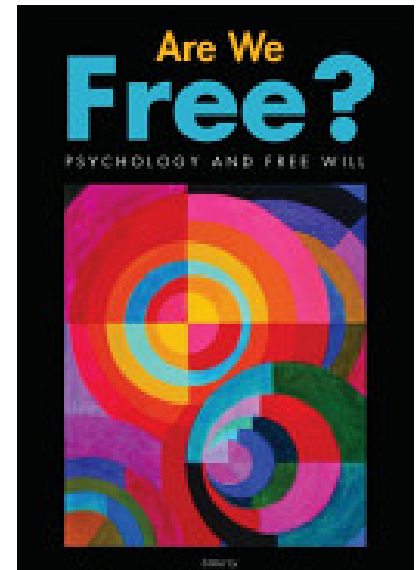
The situation is confusing, to say the least. Among the things one would like to know are: (1.) What, exactly, is the empirical evidence? (2.) Is the claim that free will is illusory supported by the

evidence, or is it based on philosophically myopic interpretations of the evidence? (3.) What can the empirical sciences contribute to the free will debate, assuming any conclusive experiment remains elusive because there will always be scope for philosophical reinterpretations.

In the case of neuroscience, these sorts of issues have been addressed in Susan Pockett et al.'s *Does Consciousness Cause Behavior?* (MIT Press, 2006). For psychology, there is now this new book. It brings together 17 papers, written mostly by psychologists but also by cognitive scientists and philosophers, and promises to look "both at recent experimental and theoretical work directly related to free will and at ways psychologists deal with the philosophical problems long associated with the question of free will" (pp. 3–4).

(1.) What is the empirical evidence? Two lines of evidence from social psychology seem to threaten the possibility of free will. On the one hand, Wegner and colleagues argue that, since subjects can be lured into feeling they will-fully did something they in fact did not do and, conversely, can act without reporting a feeling of being the actor, the experience of will-fully acting is a post hoc interpretation by our brain and as fallible as any other causal interpretation (Wegner, ch. 11).

On the other hand, the research of John Bargh and colleagues on automaticity suggests that most of our everyday behaviour is determined, not by our conscious



intentions and deliberate choices, but by mental processes that are unconsciously triggered by extraneous, environmental factors (Myers, ch. 3; Bargh, ch. 7; Kihlstrom, ch. 8, on the other hand, argues that automaticity is not as widespread as Bargh claims).

(2.) Unimpeachable evidence or mere interpretation? Regarding Wegner's experiments concerning the dissociability of the feeling of agency and de facto agency, it ought to be kept in mind that to show that the feeling of agency is sometimes illusory is not to show that it is always illusory and thus never an indicator of freely exercised will (Mele, ch. 18).

Regarding Bargh's research on automaticity, it is usually taken for granted that, if our actions spring mostly from automatic and unconscious mental processes, then we are not as free as we like to suppose (Myers, ch. 3; Bargh, ch. 7). But why this should be so? One

possibility would be to claim that, for an action to count as free, it must be due only to factors of which the agent is conscious. However, no one, not even libertarians it seems, would accept such a strong view (see Nichols, ch. 2; Dweck and Molden, ch. 4; Shariff et al., ch. 9 for the different conceptions of free will). What, then, is the connection between automaticity research and the free will debate? Compatibilists (Bandura, ch. 6; Dennett, ch. 12; Baer, ch. 16) argue that since free will is compatible with determinism they are immune to empirical challenges that purport to show that our actions are neurally determined. According to compatibilism, we are free if we are in control of our actions in the sense that our actions accord with our consciously reflected beliefs, desires, dispositions and values (see Bandura, ch. 6; Roediger et al., ch. 10; Howard, ch. 13; Miller and Attencio, ch. 14 for the notion of 'control'). But automaticity research seems to suggest precisely that we do not exert this kind of control because the goals of our actions can be induced in us by environmental factors without us being consciously aware of it. A striking and rarely noticed consequence of this is that compatibilism could be true and free will nevertheless impossible.

(3.) What else can psychology contribute? Is our folk notion of free will a compatibilist or an in-compatibilist one? Usually, this is regarded as a purely philosophical question. However, recent experiments in psychology (Nichols, ch. 2) seem to suggest that the folk concept of free choice (which is already employed by children) is in-compatibilist because it involves the idea that agents could have done otherwise than they did. Another area where psychology can contribute to the free will debate, even if it cannot decisively resolve it, has to do with what would happen to our moral, legal, and social system if free will turned out not to exist. This, too, has been taken to be a purely philosophical question. Yet recent

psychological research suggests that, when subjects are induced to believe that determinism is true and free will illusory (see Pinker, ch. 17 on the threats of determinism), they behave less ethically than when being primed neutrally or pro-free-will (Shariff et al., ch. 9). One suggestion for further research

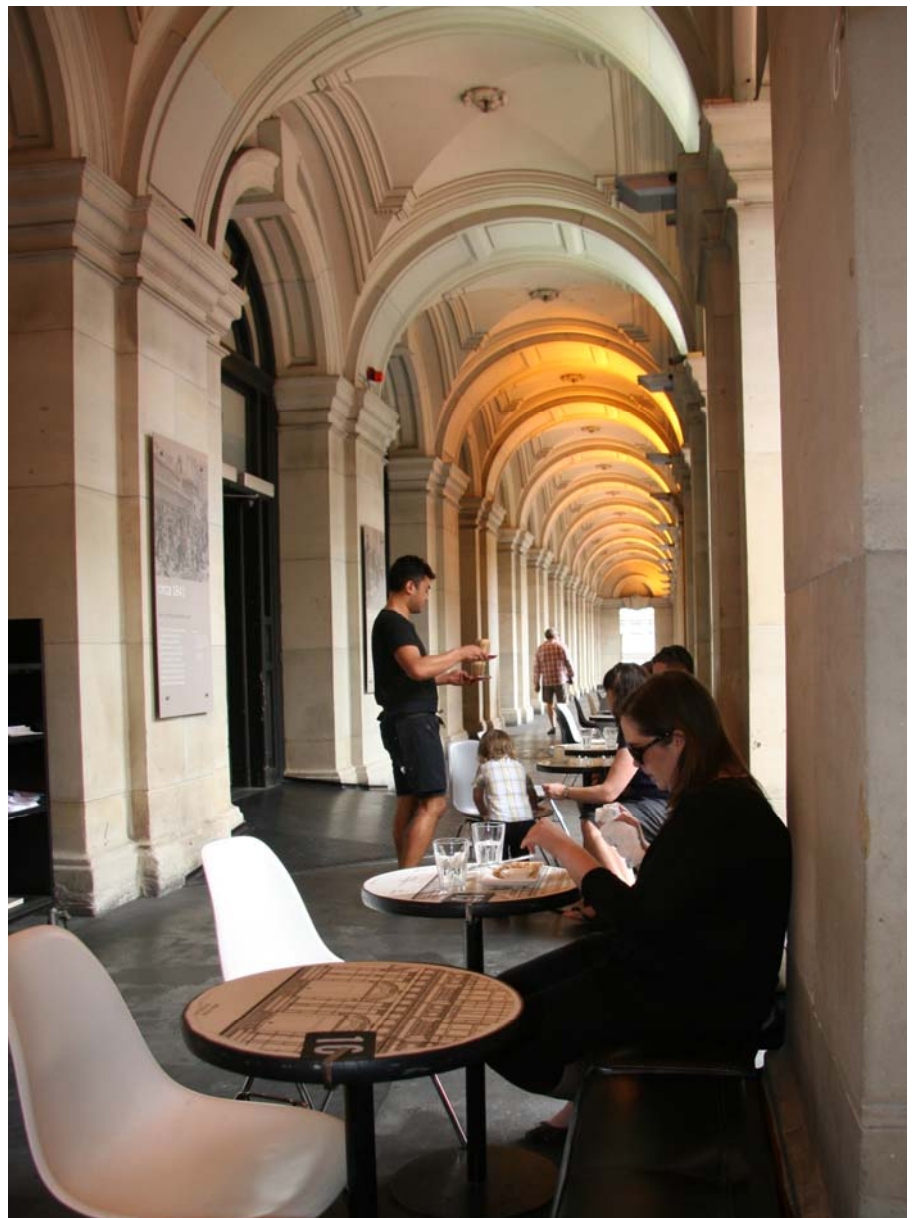
would be to test whether subjects' tendency for blame and praise are equally diminished by a belief in determinism, or whether, as I would predict, they continue to hold people responsible for the good things done, but not for the bad ones.

For readers new to the field and with interests broader than the purely philosophical, the book contains valuable background material

covering the basic arguments, positions, and distinctions. One may of course quibble over the details of some contributions, but overall they are interesting and unlikely to lead anyone seriously astray. The book's most important virtue, perhaps, is that it moves beyond the largely theoretical libertarianism vs. compatibilism and determinism vs. indeterminism arguments that have shaped the philosophical debate hitherto, and instead focuses on some interesting and potentially more constructive narrower issues (e.g. the notion of 'control') to which psychology can fruitfully contribute.

Reviewed by:

Professor Sven Walter



The Federal Coffee Palace, 350 Bourke St. Melbourne

Photo, Rob Mason



The Ghostly Illusion of Freewill



Brent Silby

During my childhood I was fascinated by videogames. One game that stands out in my memory is Pacman. It wasn't the gameplay that interested me so much as the behaviour of the ghosts. As you watch them roam around the maze, you get the feeling that they are intelligent. They seem to be making decisions about how best to catch Pacman. But how free are their decisions? One of the interesting things I noticed was that I could play exactly the same game over and over if I moved Pacman in precisely the same way each time. The ghosts always followed the same behavioral pattern and didn't deviate from that pattern until I changed my pattern. Experimenting with Pacman in this way revealed to me something about the ghosts' behavior. True, they make decisions, but their decisions are firmly and predictably determined by the way I move around the maze.

Another way to reveal the ghosts' behavior is by analyzing the Pacman computer program. Toru Iwatani, the creator of Pacman, has intimate knowledge of the program and can precisely predict how the ghosts will behave in any given situation. This is achieved by analyzing gameplay variables such as the x,y position of Pacman and the x,y position of each of the ghosts, then working through the program's source code to determine how each ghost will move in light of these variables. So it seems that the ghosts, while making decisions in a sense, are not making

free decisions. Their moves are based on an a pre-defined set of rules—an algorithm—which produces behavior in response to the state of the game. If Pacman is positioned to the left of a ghost, the ghost will move left—unless its path is blocked by a wall. If its path is blocked, the ghost will either move up or down, and this choice depends upon whether there is another ghost approaching from above or below. Whenever this situation occurs, the ghost acts in precisely the same way. Ghosts cannot act differently because their behaviour is determined by the computer program.



Now, this may seem obvious. Of course the ghosts have to follow rules. If they didn't, they might never catch Pacman. The ghosts do not have freewill. They can't decide not to chase Pacman. They do exactly what their program tells them to do in any given situation. However, they do provide an illusion that they are making free choices.

We can accept that the ghosts in Pacman do not have freewill because they inhabit a simple deterministic world, but what about more sophisticated entities such as humans? Surely we have freewill. After all, our behaviour is much more complex, and we certainly feel free?

Intuitively, many declare that we most certainly do have freewill. But we have to remind ourselves that the world we inhabit is also a

deterministic system—more complicated than the Pacman world, but deterministic nonetheless. There are laws of nature that are consistent throughout the Universe. These laws determine the behavior of all natural systems from planetary motion to the firing of neurons in the human brain.

Now, in analyzing the neural activity of the brain, philosophers such as Paul Churchland (1996) conclude that the brain is a type of computer. It is not a digital computer like a Pacman machine; rather, it is device known as a connectionist network.

Interestingly, since computer scientists can simulate connectionist networks using traditional digital computers (Copeland & Proudfoot, 2000; Fischetti, 2011), it is possible that future scientists will be able to represent the neural activity of the entire brain as a digital computer program. Such a program would be unimaginably more complex than the Pacman program. However, despite its complexity, scientists could, in principle (although unlikely in practice) use it to make accurate predictions about a person's behavior. They would do this in the same way that Toru Iwatani predicts the behavior of Pacman's ghosts—by collecting complete information about the current state of the world, analyzing the current state of a person's

memory, then working through the brain's program to discover the person's next action.

Imagine, for example, that scientists have a printout of Fred's brain. This printout contains the complete brain program and a full memory download. Armed with this printout, along with complete knowledge of the laws of physics and current state of the world, scientists predict that at midday on July 23rd Fred will murder his business partner, Robert. Imagine now that Fred does indeed commit murder just as predicted. The scientists knew that Fred was going to commit the crime before Fred made the decision. In this way, it seems that Fred's decision was not free. In fact, with all the conditions in place, it would have been impossible for Fred to choose anything other than to murder Robert. Why? Because if he was to choose anything else, the scientists would have predicted that outcome. You can imagine resetting the world to its state at 6am on July 23rd and watching the whole scenario play out identically—just like resetting the Pacman machine and playing an identical game.

Given that we live in a Universe governed by a consistent set of rules; and given that our brains are computational devices that operate according to the laws of physics, it seems we cannot escape the conclusion that we do not have freewill. We experience an illusion of freewill, but essentially, we are as free as the ghosts roaming around Pacman's maze.

Brent Silby

References

Churchland, P.M. (1996), *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul*, The MIT Press, 1996

Copeland, B.J. and Proudfoot, D. (2000) "Turing's Neural Networks of 1948" http://www.alanturing.net/turing_archive/pages/Reference%20Articles/connectionism/Turing%27s%20neural%20networks.html, [Accessed



27 December 2011]

I met Sasha in Swanston St. near Meyers Department store, Melbourne. I asked him about the question of Free will and Determinism. He answered me with these words which were recorded on a Sony voice recorder.

Sasha's words; I think we do have free will and I think people have a lot more control than they think they do. People are brought up to behave and believe in certain things and act in certain ways. However I think there's the possibility of moving beyond that to a higher level as you might say.

Question; What might bring that about?



LESHA & TANYA ENJOYING TIME TOGETHER IN A RUSSIAN CAFE

This drawing was created in a bustling Saint Petersburg cafe-bar that is one part bookshop, one part student hangout leaving the rest of the ample space for those people in the city who like a relaxed atmosphere. The café is called Pirogi, it's a laid back cafe vibe, while the indie music and late open hours keep it in the bar bracket too. Nothing rowdy ever kicks off here, this is more the place for long philosophical discussions and games of Jenga. The couple featured in the drawing are Lesha & Tanya, two Russian intellectuals.

The drawing was completed by 23 year old, Ekaterina Khozatskaya who has lived in Saint Petersburg all her life.

She says that in the 90's it was hard to imagine that computers, internet, mobile phones would exist in almost every home but today it is a fact! And it's no longer a problem to travel overseas.

<http://www.behance.net/KateHo>

