

# Year 11 Philosophy - Free Will and Determinism

## Readings and Coursework Entries

Due: ~~Friday Feb 14<sup>th</sup>~~

Read and annotate (highlight and make notes on) the following.

The set readings can be found at the back of this booklet.

The coursework entries appear in italics throughout and should be completed in full, detailed sentences in your workbook. Where possible, incorporate quotations from the readings in your responses.

### Introduction

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Is our future set, or is it open? Do we have free will? Can we make choices and decisions freely, or are these governed by factors beyond our control?

It certainly *seems* or *feels* like we have free will, but is this feeling just an illusion? If someone asks me if I'd like a cup of tea or coffee, it seems to me that it is entirely my free choice and I could choose either one, right?

To most people, the future is open. There appear to be an infinite number of paths we can take and it is our choices, or our will, that determines the future.

However, there are some philosophers who hold that the future is one set path, laid out in front of us and leading off into the distance. In this sense, our *destiny* or our *fate* is already *determined*. The person you will marry, the children you will have, the home you will buy, the date and manner of your death and so on, are already set and completely out of your control. If this is so, then one's future could be predicted; if we knew the exact laws of nature, your complete genetic make up, all of the events in your personal history that have led to the present moment, we'd be able to predict what you would do next - even what you would do ten years from now.

Can you say that you are a free agent, the author of your own actions and destiny? Can you freely choose whether you want to become a teacher, a truck driver or a doctor, or would such a decision be predetermined by all of the preceding events in your history, your genetic make up and the laws of nature?

### Free Will

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Free will is the ability of agents to make free choices. Free will suggests that the conduct of human beings expresses personal choice and is not simply determined by physical or divine forces.

It certainly seems that we have free will. You started reading this sentence, but you don't have to...finish it. Right?

We seem to have an unlimited number of options in our lives. Nothing forces our hand. It seems natural to say that we are *entirely* free to choose what to do. This is the doctrine of free will.



*In your workbook:*

1. Define free will in your own words and support with an example (eg. a free choice one might make).

## Determinism

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Determinism is the thesis that every event has a cause. According to determinists, there are no events that are uncaused.



To a determinist, an event is necessitated by:

- (i) Events preceding it. Every event has a cause; eg. wind causes trees to bend, thirst causes people to drink, friction causes heat etc. Cause and effect; events are like a line of dominoes and each event causes the next and the next and so on). Events are linked by an unbroken chain of physical cause and effect.
- (ii) The laws of nature (physical forces like gravity, motion, inertia, conduction of heat, electromagnetism and nuclear forces). The universe is mechanistic and works in accordance with set rules.

In principle, if you knew everything about the state of the universe (including a person's complete past) and everything about the laws of nature, you could predict what will happen tomorrow - even what a person will do tomorrow.

Of course, we have neither the power to change the laws of nature, nor to change events in the past.

So, does that mean we have no free will after all?

*In your workbook:*

2. Define determinism in your own words.
3. Give three of your own examples of events that are caused.
4. Explain in detail how a car crash might be determined.
5. Think back to an important decision or event that has occurred in your life. Explore the causes of this event. Explore how it may have been determined and not of your own free will.
6. Are there any events that you can be certain will happen in the future?

## Hard Determinism

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Hard Determinism is the position that, given the laws of nature and what happened in the past we can only deduce *one possible future*. There is only *one possible action* a person can take in any given situation. Our sense of having free choices is an illusion, because each act, preceded by an unbroken chain of cause and effect and governed by strict laws of nature, could not have happened otherwise.

The feeling that you could choose a red apple or a green one is an illusion. We do all our thinking with our brain. But, the brain is a physical object and the behaviour of physical objects is governed by the laws of nature.

If whatever one does is the result of the Laws of Nature and of one's physical and genetic makeup and one's personal history, then - since all these 'factors' are 'set' (or 'in place') at the moment of one's acting - you must undertake the action you perform, that action must occur. You are powerless to prevent yourself from undertaking that action.

### Hard Determinism

P1: Determinism is true (all events have causes)

P2: Since determinism is true, even mental states like volitions (which cause our actions) have causes.

P3: People only have free will if their volitions have no causes.

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C: Therefore, free will is an illusion and there is only one possible future.

### ***In your workbook:***

7. *Copy the premises and conclusion of the argument above.*

8. *What is meant by 'volition'? Define this term.*

### **Reading 1: Clifford Williams, 'Free Will and Determinism: A Dialogue'**

You will hopefully find reading this dialogue quite useful. There are three philosophers in this dialogue; Daniel who is a Determinist, Frederick who is a Free-willist and Carolyn who is a Compatibilist. They represent the three main positions in this debate and the reader can easily remember which position each participant has because the first letter of their name is the first letter of the position they hold.

### ***In your workbook:***

9. *Explore the idea that the two murderers in the first example did not act freely, that this murder was determined and completely out of their control. What possible factors or causes could have led to these boys committing this murder? List as many as you can think of.*

10. *How might the boys' biology or genetic make up also determined this event?*

11. *Could the laws of nature have also helped to determine this horrific event? Explore.*

12. *Reread p. 8 & 9 of this dialogue. What is important about findings in quantum physics for the free will - determinism debate? Explain in detail.*

13. *How does Daniel try and escape this strong argument against determinism? Quote him here.*

### **Compatibilism (or Soft Determinism)**

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The two opposing views (free will and determinism) seem to be in direct opposition to each other. That is, they seem incompatible with each other. It can seem absurd that a person can be both free and determined.

However, compatibilism offers a solution to the free will-determinism problem.

Compatibilists argue that determinism is actually compatible with free will. It is the belief that free will and determinism are compatible ideas, and that it is possible to believe both without being logically inconsistent.

Most compatibilists accept the view that there exists a causal chain of events going back indefinitely in time, consistent with the laws of nature. But, as long as our own will is included in that causal chain, we are free, they say.

The classic compatibilist position is to argue that what freedom means is freedom from coercion or impediments, not freedom from causation. Yes, events in the past effect what will happen in the future, but so long as we are not restrained or forced to act in a certain way, we are free. As long as an agent is free from external coercion, they have freedom of action.

So, if I can do what I want, then I am free. If a person puts a gun to my head and I am stopped from doing what I want, then I am not free.

**Reading 2:** Clifford Williams, *'Free Will and Determinism: A Dialogue'*

***In your workbook:***

14. *Define compatibilism in your own words.*
15. *(a) Why is Caroline unable to reject determinism? Quote her in your answer.  
(b) Why is Caroline unable to reject free will? Quote her in your answer.*
16. *How does Caroline define freedom?*
17. *(a) List some of the choices she says we are free to make.  
(b) List some of the things she says we are forced to do (not free).*
16. *Why does Frederick reject Caroline's conception of freedom?*
17. *Record your own thoughts on compatibilism here. Do you think determinism is compatible with free will? Can a person be both free and determined? Explore in detail.*

## **Moral Responsibility**

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**Reading 3:** Clifford Williams, *'Free Will and Determinism: A Dialogue'*

***In your workbook:***

18. *What implications for moral responsibility does hard determinism pose? Suppose that determinism is true and the two young murderers in the first reading could not have acted otherwise and their murder of the little boy was determined by forces beyond their control, can they be held responsible for this act and punished?*
20. *What implications does hard determinism have for heroes who risk their lives to save others in bushfires, floods, shootouts or other times of crisis/danger?*
21. *Despite being a determinist, Daniel argues that even though we are not morally responsible for how we act, we should still use blame and punishment (punish people for bad acts and reward good acts). Why, if their actions were beyond their control?*

## **God and Foreknowledge**

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Some hard determinists point to how God is omniscient (all knowing) to support their position that we have no free will. As God is omniscient, He/She must therefore know everything that has happened in the past and everything that is happening in the present, right now. But, more than that; God must also know everything that will happen in the future. This is known as foreknowledge. If God knows exactly what I'm going to do tomorrow, do I really have a choice in what I'll do tomorrow? This presents some serious problems for our free will.

The argument for the seeming impossibility of both God's having foreknowledge and our having free will has troubled religious thinkers and philosophers for centuries.



*"You realize, of course, that these imply free will?"*

It is clear why theologians are troubled by the challenge of foreknowledge and free will. For most religions insist that God gave human beings free will and thus human beings can choose right from wrong, and that (in some religions at least) wrongful acts are sinful and worthy of divine punishment, while good acts are righteous and worthy of divine reward. But many of these same religions will also insist that God is omniscient, that is, God knows everything (and thus has perfect foreknowledge). Yet, on the face of it, each of these two claims appears to contradict the other.

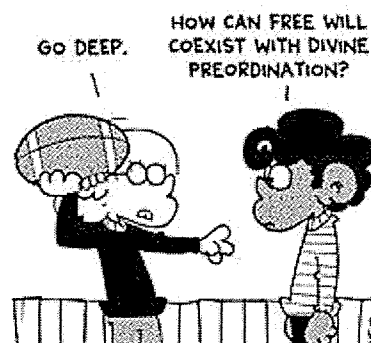
***In your workbook:***

22. *Define foreknowledge in your own words and explain why God's omniscience poses a problem for those who insist that human beings have free will. What is the contradiction here? Is this a paradox?*
23. *Could it be possible that God is both omniscient and that He/She gave us free will? Explore in depth.*

**Reading 4: Richard Taylor, 'The Story of Osmo'**

***In your workbook:***

24. *Quote the predicted manner and details of Osmo's death in the future, that he finds in Chapter 29.*
25. *What measures does Osmo take to try and prevent this event from occurring? Does a paradox arise here?*
26. *Can Osmo be said to have free will? Explain.*
27. *In two or three paragraphs, state and defend your own position on the Free Will vs Determinism question.*



# Reading #1

## FREE WILL and DETERMINISM A Dialogue

### Participants:

FREDERICK: Free-willist  
DANIEL: Determinist  
CAROLYN: Compatibilist

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

FREDERICK: Here comes Carolyn. Maybe she can tell us what she thinks about the case.  
DANIEL: Hello, Carolyn.  
CAROLYN: Hello, Daniel. Hi, Frederick.  
FREDERICK: Daniel and I were talking about the Leopold and Loeb murder trial.  
CAROLYN: Was that the trial at which Clarence Darrow tried to persuade the judge that the defendants should not be hanged for murdering a little boy?  
FREDERICK: Yes. The trial made headlines all over the country. Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb were only eighteen years old at the time, and their parents were well known throughout Chicago where they lived.  
CAROLYN: Why did Leopold and Loeb kill the little boy?  
FREDERICK: They wanted to commit the perfect crime.  
CAROLYN: Is that all?  
FREDERICK: Yes. They went to a school just as the children were leaving, picked up a youngster whom they happened to know, drove around for awhile, and then hit him on the head with a chisel, so that he bled to death right in the car. After that, they stuffed his body into a culvert in some out-of-the-way locality.  
CAROLYN: How ghastly!  
FREDERICK: I agree. Maybe that's why the newspapers played it up so big.

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### FREE WILL and DETERMINISM: A DIALOGUE

CAROLYN: What was Darrow's strategy at the trial?  
FREDERICK: Darrow argued that the judge should have compassion on the two young murderers, because what they did was the product of causes over which they had no control. Let me read to you what he actually said. "I do not know what it was that made these boys do this mad act, but I do know there is a reason for it. I know they did not beget themselves. I know that any one of an infinite number of causes reaching back to the beginning might be working out in these boys' minds, whom you are asked to hang in malice and in hatred and injustice, because someone in the past has sinned against them."  
CAROLYN: That certainly is a bold strategy for a defense attorney to use!  
FREDERICK: Yes it is. Listen to what he goes on to say. "Nature is strong and she is pitiless. She works in her own mysterious way, and we are her victims. We have not much to do with it ourselves. Nature takes this job in hand, and we play our parts."  
CAROLYN: Was the judge persuaded to reduce Leopold and Loeb's punishment?  
FREDERICK: Yes, he must have been, because he sentenced them to life imprisonment, even though he was under great pressure from the public to sentence them to death.  
CAROLYN: What do you think about Darrow's strategy?  
FREDERICK: I think it is absurd, because it is based on the false belief that everything we do is determined. If that were true, then the two murderers could not have acted freely, which is obviously false.  
DANIEL: I would say that Clarence Darrow is right in believing that everything we do is determined. If that means that the two murderers did not act freely, then that is what we should believe.  
FREDERICK: What would you say about this case, Carolyn?  
CAROLYN: I think Darrow is right in believing that everything we do is caused by previous happenings. But I also think that we are free and morally responsible for what we do.  
FREDERICK: That sounds contradictory to me. If it was determined that Leopold and Loeb would kill the little boy, I don't see how they could have done it freely.  
DANIEL: Why don't we discuss the whole issue of free will and determinism? Maybe we can resolve our disagreements.

### Determinism

FREDERICK: That's a good idea. Would you like to stay, Carolyn?  
CAROLYN: Yes, I would be glad to. I don't think, however, that the issue should be put solely in terms of free will or determinism.  
FREDERICK: How do you think it should be put?  
CAROLYN: I would say that there are three main questions: One, do people have free will? Two, is determinism true? And three, are free will and determinism compatible?  
FREDERICK: My answers to those questions are that people have free will, that free will and determinism are incompatible, and, therefore, that determinism is false.  
DANIEL: My reasoning is just the opposite. Since determinism is true, people have no free will.  
CAROLYN: I agree with you, Frederick, that people have freedom, and with you Daniel, that determinism is true, but I don't think that the two conflict.  
**DETERMINISM**  
FREDERICK: Perhaps we should define "determinism" before we start discussing our positions.  
CAROLYN: That's a good idea. My definition of "determinism" is, "Everything that happens is caused to happen." In contemporary philosophical jargon, this is the same as saying that every event has a cause. That includes everything we ever do, think or say.  
FREDERICK: Why do you define it that way and not as "People have no control over anything they do"?  
CAROLYN: Because the question of whether or not we have control over anything we do is different from the question of whether or not everything we do is caused. And each of these two questions is different from the question of whether we can have control over anything we do *even if* everything we do is caused. That's why I said before that there are *three* main questions and not just two: One, Do we have control over anything we do? Two, Is everything we do caused? And three, Can we have control over what we do even if everything we do is caused? We can discuss these three questions separately, so we can give three different names to their answers—"free will" if we answer "Yes" to the first; "determinism" if we answer "Yes" to the second; and "compatibilism" if we answer "Yes" to the third.  
DANIEL: Don't people usually think of determinism as saying

that people have no free will?

CAROLYN: Yes, people probably do think of determinism in that way. But I think that what determinism *says* should be clearly distinguished from what it may or may not *entail*. It says only that everything that happens is caused. Whether or not it entails that we have no free will is a different question altogether.

FREDERICK: You're saying that we should define "determinism" in a relatively neutral way, such as "Everything that happens has a cause," and talk first about whether this claim is true, and then about whether it entails that we have no free will, right?

CAROLYN: Right.

FREDERICK: That sounds like a good procedure.

DANIEL: I'll start by giving my reason for believing that everything that happens has a cause. I think this is true because of the enormous amount of happenings for which we have found causes. Both in daily life and in science we come across countless cases of caused happenings.

FREDERICK: Can you give some examples?

DANIEL: Yes. Wind causes trees to bend. Rain causes plants to grow. Friction causes heat.

FREDERICK: Can you give examples involving people?

DANIEL: Yes. Hunger causes people to eat. Peer pressure causes people to conform. Stress causes people to become tense. And so on. There are so many instances of what we do being caused that one cannot escape the conclusion that everything we do is caused.

CAROLYN: I agree.

DANIEL: And the extraordinary success of science in finding explanations makes it almost impossible to doubt determinism. Biology tells us that heredity determines what kind of persons we will be. Sociology tells us that environmental factors determine much of what we do. Psychology tells us that what we become as adults is influenced largely by what happens to us when we are young children. Psychiatry tells us that our conscious desires are products of unconscious motives. Neurology tells us that what we do is caused by electrical-chemical happenings in our brains. And all of them together tell us that everything we do, say, want or think is produced entirely by previous occurrences.

FREDERICK: How would you explain the murder committed by Leopold and Loeb?

DANIEL: According to the psychiatrist who examined them, they were emotionally ill. One of them was paranoid and had intense nervous energy; the other was manic-depressive and had as a personal philosophy the gratification of his own desires. Given these factors, we can see what triggered their outburst of murderous passion.

FREDERICK: How would you explain an everyday occurrence, such as my buying a mystery novel?

DANIEL: Based on what I know about you, I would say that your delight in reading suspense stories and your knowing that you will have some free time cause you to make the purchase.

CAROLYN: I like what you have been saying, Daniel. I think determinism is true for the same reason you do. Would you mind if I stated that reason in a different way?

DANIEL: No, go ahead.

CAROLYN: I want to link up your statement about finding causes with a description of what exactly it is for a happening to have a cause.

DANIEL: Okay.

CAROLYN: If something that happens is caused to happen, then it could have been different in the way it happened only if something just prior to it were different. But if something that happens has *no* cause, then it could have been different in the way it happened *even if* everything just prior to it were exactly the same. That means that determinism would not be correct *if*, whenever we found differences in the way things usually happen, we *also* found that the prior conditions were exactly the same. But we never do find this. What we find is that whenever there are differences in the way things usually happen, there are also differences in the prior conditions. The only fair conclusion, I think, is that determinism is true.

FREDERICK: Could you illustrate that with an example?

CAROLYN: Yes. Suppose a strong gust of wind hits the tree in my front yard but does not knock it down. And suppose that later another strong gust of wind hits the tree and does knock it down. We would naturally think that the conditions prior to the tree's falling down were different from what they were when the wind hit the tree the first time.

Perhaps the wind was stronger the second time, or perhaps it hit the tree from a different direction. The reason we would think this is that we naturally think that the wind caused the tree to fall over the second time. We would say that the tree's falling over has no cause only if we found that the initial conditions each time were exactly the same. But in a case like this, we invariably find some difference in the initial conditions.

FREDERICK: Do you think the same can be said about what people do?

CAROLYN: Yes. Suppose one person reacts with great anger to personal insults, whereas another person reacts with calmness and equanimity. When we look into their characters, we find differences that account for the different ways they react. We don't find that their genetic inheritance and social and family environment are exactly the same. But only if we did find this could we say that determinism is false.

FREDERICK: What would you say about identical twins who are brought up in the same family, yet who grow up to have different personalities? That seems to me to be a case in which the initial conditions are the same but the outcomes are different.

CAROLYN: If you could show me a case where identical twins grew up in exactly the same environment yet turned out to be different, then I would admit that determinism is false. But showing that two children grew up in exactly the same environment seems impossible. There are vast differences in the way children are treated and in what they experience. These differences can lead to still further differences, and so produce different personalities.

DANIEL: I would be interested in hearing your reactions to our argument for determinism, Frederick.

FREDERICK: Well, as I have already said, I don't think determinism is true. So, naturally, I disagree with your argument for it.

DANIEL: What do you think is wrong with our argument?

FREDERICK: Two things. In the first place, I don't think it shows that *everything* we do is determined. And in the second place, it seems to me to ignore the fact that there is concrete evidence against determinism.

DANIEL: Could you explain each of those points?

FREDERICK: Yes. I'll start with the first one. Even though you two are right in saying that science and everyday experience show that much of what we do is determined, I don't think there is enough evidence to show that everything is. There are, after all, many happenings for which we don't know the causes. And there are many areas of human behavior that scientists haven't investigated yet. So I don't see how you can claim that *all* of what we do is caused.

DANIEL: Carolyn and I aren't saying that people actually have discovered the causes of every happening. What we are saying is that it is legitimate to *infer* that everything we do is determined from the fact that much of what we do is determined. In daily life, we frequently make this kind of inference. For instance, we infer that all of the grass in the world is green after seeing only some of the world's grass. We infer that all heavy objects fall on the basis of seeing only a small number of heavy objects fall. If you think these inferences are valid, then you should believe that determinism is true on the basis of the evidence that science and everyday experience provide.

FREDERICK: No, I don't think I should, because the percentage of the world's events we have observed is much smaller than the percentage of grass and falling objects we have observed. In the case of the grass and falling objects, we may have seen as much as five or ten percent, but when it comes to the total number of events in the world, we can scarcely have observed more than one-millionth of one-millionth of one percent. In view of this fact, isn't it rather presumptuous to say that every single event is caused?

DANIEL: No, it's not presumptuous, because over the past several centuries, scientists have discovered the causes of enormous numbers of occurrences. Surely, that is a good reason for believing in determinism.

FREDERICK: Compared to what scientists knew centuries ago, we do, indeed, have a great deal of knowledge. But compared to what could be known, we have very little. And even the knowledge scientists do have about people is general and imprecise. It leaves plenty of room for free and uncaused actions. For example, you said earlier that peer pressure causes people to conform. But that's not always so. There are plenty of exceptions. And there are

exceptions to almost every other causal explanation of people's behavior.

DANIEL: That may be true, but science has progressed to the point where many of the exceptions can themselves be explained. If a person doesn't conform when confronted with peer pressure, his behavior can be explained by means of a different causal law. Scientists have discovered so many causal laws that we are justified, I believe, in thinking that all of our behavior is governed by causal laws.

FREDERICK: Well, that seems to me to be nothing more than a mere hope, not based on good, solid evidence. Besides, you still have my second point to contend with, namely, that there is actual evidence against determinism.

DANIEL: What is that evidence?

FREDERICK: It's evidence that scientists have discovered in a branch of physics called quantum physics, or micro-physics. In the early part of the twentieth century, physicists began studying the behavior of electrons, photons and other subatomic particles. What they found was that the movements of individual electrons and photons were random. There was nothing that explained why an electron or photon moved as it did. For example, it was discovered that electrons sometimes jump from one orbit to another without any apparent cause. And in the "shooting photon" experiment, it was found that when photons were shot at a barrier with two holes in it, it was impossible to explain why individual photons went through one hole rather than another.

DANIEL: Haven't scientists discovered any laws governing the behavior of subatomic particles?

FREDERICK: Yes, they have, but many of the laws they have discovered are only statistical ones, which don't explain the behavior of individual electrons and photons. They explain only what groups of electrons and photons do as groups. For instance, in the shooting photon experiment, physicists can tell how many of the photons will go through each hole, but they can't tell which ones will go through which hole. And in the jumping electron phenomenon, physicists know that a certain percentage of electrons will suddenly jump to a new orbit, but they can't tell which ones will do it or when they will do it.

DANIEL: What do you think is the significance of these new discoveries?

FREDERICK: I think that quantum physics has revolutionized our view of reality. Previously, scientists assumed that every occurrence was causally explainable, but now quantum physics has shown that this assumption is not true. Some kinds of occurrences are random and uncaused.

CAROLYN: How would you respond to this, Daniel?

DANIEL: My first reaction would be to wonder whether quantum physics really has shown that some kinds of occurrences are uncaused. There is so much evidence for determinism that I think we should be very skeptical when anyone claims to have found something that is uncaused.

FREDERICK: That's what the quantum physicists said at first, too. But their new discoveries were so startling that many of them changed their minds.

DANIEL: The only thing quantum physics has shown, so far as I can tell, is that we don't know the causes of certain kinds of occurrences. But this is far different from knowing that the occurrences don't have causes.

FREDERICK: No, quantum physics has shown that there is an actual lack of causality in the subatomic realm, not just that we don't know the causes. Consider the case of the shooting photons. When physicists shoot a stream of photons at a barrier, they find that the photons don't hit the barrier all at the same place. Some of the photons hit the barrier at places other than the spot at which the photons are shot, in the same way that some of the light from a flashlight hits a wall at places other than the exact place at which the flashlight is aimed. This phenomenon is called the photon dispersion effect. There is nothing about the way the photons are shot that explains their different directions of travel. Each photon is shot in exactly the same way. So the situation conforms to Carolyn's description of an uncaused happening—same initial conditions but different outcomes.

DANIEL: I don't see how anyone could know that the initial conditions are exactly the same. The most that anyone can say is that no one has found what accounts for the different outcomes. In the future, someone may well discover what causes the photons to disperse.

FREDERICK: According to quantum physicists, we will never find the cause. In fact, they say, we literally cannot find the cause, because the only instruments physicists can use to detect the movements of subatomic particles are so much larger than the particles themselves that the movement of the particles is changed whenever the physicists attempt to observe the particles. This situation is just like trying to find how fast a marble is moving by throwing a basketball at it. Obviously, the marble is going to change its speed when the basketball hits it.

DANIEL: If what you say is correct, then it is, indeed, impossible for us ever to find the cause of the photon dispersion effect. But that's not the same as saying that there is no cause. There still may be a cause even though no one can ever find it.

CAROLYN: I agree. There is no method of observing that an occurrence has no cause. Here is an example. Suppose the light in this room were to come on suddenly and then five seconds later go off. We don't see the cause of this mysterious phenomenon, but neither do we see that it has no cause. Something of which we have no conception might have caused it. So we can't say that it has no cause, but only that we don't know what it is.

DANIEL: Right. And the same is true at the subatomic level. There may be something of which we presently have no conception that is causing the photon dispersion effect.

CAROLYN: This means that there is no way to disprove determinism. If determinism were false, no one could ever know it.

DANIEL: I have another reaction to what you have been saying, Frederick.

FREDERICK: What is it?

DANIEL: I'm wondering what the new discoveries in quantum physics have to do with free will. In order for them to be relevant, wouldn't it have to be shown that our actions are the result of the uncaused behavior of electrons and photons in our brains?

FREDERICK: Yes, that's right.

DANIEL: Well, then, I don't see how the new discoveries are relevant, because scientists haven't shown that the uncaused activities of subatomic particles produce our free

actions. But until they do show this, it is entirely possible that everything we do is determined, even if occurrences at the subatomic level are uncaused.

FREDERICK: It seems to me that if occurrences at the subatomic level are uncaused, then it is much more likely that some ordinary-level occurrences are uncaused.

DANIEL: No, that doesn't follow, because there is a huge amount of evidence for ordinary-level occurrences being caused. This means we can safely believe that all of our actions are caused, regardless of what quantum physics says about subatomic phenomena.



# Reading #2

## WHETHER DETERMINISM IS COMPATIBLE WITH FREE WILL

- FREDERICK: Perhaps we should turn to the question of whether determinism is compatible with free will.
- CAROLYN: Okay.
- DANIEL: That's okay with me, too, except that I don't see the need for much of a discussion since it seems obvious that no one can be both free and determined. If everything we do is determined, as you and I have been arguing, Carolyn, then nothing we do can be free.
- FREDERICK: I agree. And if some of what we do is free, as I have been arguing, then not everything we do can be determined.
- DANIEL: That seems so obvious that I wonder why anyone would seriously wonder otherwise.
- CAROLYN: There is a good motive for seriously wondering otherwise. The evidence for determinism is so strong that one cannot help believing it. And the belief in free will is so evident that one cannot help believing it, either. That means that a person who thinks that free will and determinism are incompatible is in a predicament. He can't believe both, because they are incompatible, yet he has to believe both because of the evidence for them.
- FREDERICK: One way for him to get out of that predicament is to deny determinism.
- CAROLYN: I know. That's your way out. But I don't think it is a good way, because of the large amount of evidence for determinism.
- DANIEL: Another way out of that predicament is to deny that people have free will.
- CAROLYN: I know. That's your way. But the intuitive conviction of free will is so strong and widespread that I am reluctant to deny that people have free will. So the only thing

circumstances and laws that constrict our freedom in various ways. So our freedom certainly is not absolute but it is, nevertheless, something we do have.

- FREDERICK: Isn't it possible to take away all of a person's freedom by not permitting him to do anything?
- CAROLYN: Yes, it certainly is possible, but it is hardly ever done. And even if a person were prevented from *doing* anything he wanted to do, he still could *think* whatever he wished. That is one freedom that is very difficult to take away.
- FREDERICK: Do you think that everyone has the same amount of freedom in your sense of the word "free"?
- CAROLYN: No. Some people have less freedom than others. People living under military dictatorships have less freedom than do people in other countries. Black people in the United States sometimes cannot obtain the job of their choice because white prejudice prevents them from doing so. But although some people are not as free as others, everyone has some measure of freedom, because no one is forced to do everything he does, and no one is prevented from doing everything he wants to do.
- FREDERICK: I understand now what your conception of being free is. Could you explain why in your sense a person can be both free and determined?
- CAROLYN: Yes. A person can be free *and* determined because what he does can be caused by something that goes on inside him even though he is not forced by some circumstance outside him to act as he does. If he is not forced by some circumstance outside him to act as he does, then he acts freely. Yet his action nonetheless could be caused by something inside him, such as an unconscious motive or a brain state.
- FREDERICK: Am I right in saying that your position involves two separate statements—the first being a statement of what it means to be free, and the second being the statement that this conception of being free does not conflict with determinism?
- CAROLYN: Yes.
- FREDERICK: Your second statement is certainly true. If being free is the same as not being prevented by external circumstances from acting as we want to, then our actions could

left for me to do is to wonder seriously whether free will and determinism really do conflict.

- FREDERICK: That's not a good reason for saying that they don't conflict, is it?
- CAROLYN: No, not at all. It's just a motive for investigating the possibility of their not conflicting. As it turns out, there is a good reason for thinking that they don't conflict.
- FREDERICK: What is it?
- CAROLYN: To say that we are free is to say that there are no persons or external circumstances preventing us from doing what we want to do. And saying that we are free in this sense is compatible with saying that determinism is true.
- FREDERICK: Why do you define freedom in that way?
- CAROLYN: I define freedom in that way because those situations in which we say a person is free are situations in which no other person or circumstance prevents him from doing what he wants to do. And those situations in which we say a person is not free are situations in which there is some person or circumstance preventing him from doing what he wants to do or forcing him to do something he does not want to do. Let me illustrate. Suppose three people suddenly grab my arm and prevent me from moving it. I would not be free to scratch my nose because they would be preventing me from doing so. But as soon as they let go, I would be free again because they would not be preventing me from acting as I wish. Or suppose the government suddenly disenfranchised all suspected subversives. They would not be free to vote because the government would be preventing them from doing so. As it is now, they are free to vote because the government is not preventing them from doing so.
- FREDERICK: Do you think people have freedom in your sense of the word "free"?
- CAROLYN: Yes. There are lots of things we are not prevented from doing, and there are lots of things we are not forced to do. We can travel where we want to, vote in any way we wish, buy any house or car we want to, and so on. Of course, we are not free to do *anything* we want to, and sometimes we are forced to do things we do not want to do. In fact, throughout our lives we are hedged by people,

be caused even though they are done freely. Determinism could then be true even though some of our actions are done freely.

- CAROLYN: What do you think about my first statement?
- FREDERICK: I think it is false, because being free in your sense is not a genuine freedom. It is a bogus freedom, not worthy of the name at all.
- CAROLYN: Why do you say that?

### UNCONSCIOUS

- FREDERICK: Because a person could have freedom in your sense even though he had no control over anything he does. Let me explain. If everything a person does were caused by unconscious motives, as you say, then he would have no control over anything he does. Unknown to him, he would be buffeted about by the workings of his unconscious mind. Yet such a person would have freedom in your sense of freedom because no external circumstances would prevent him from doing what he consciously wants to do. That means your conception of freedom is a sham—a person who has freedom in your sense does not have control over what he does.
- CAROLYN: That is an interesting response to my position, but I don't think it discredits my concept of freedom. Whether or not something inside us causes us to act as we do is irrelevant to whether or not we are free. What counts is whether or not something outside us prevents us from acting as we wish. If nothing does, we are free.
- FREDERICK: You can call that freedom if you want to, but it is a pseudofreedom. Suppose a very smart neurosurgeon could put a device into a person's brain that would cause him to do everything he does. He would be just like a robot. In no significant sense could he be said to have free will, because he would not have control over anything he does. He would not even have control over what he *wants* to do, because the device would cause him to want to do what he does. Yet he would have freedom in your sense of freedom, because no external barriers or obstacles prevent him from doing what he wants to do. So your conception of freedom is bogus—a "robot-person" who has freedom in your sense does not have any control over what he does. Who would want a freedom from external con-

# Reading #3

## DETERMINISM AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

DANIEL: Shall we consider the question of moral responsibility now?

FREDERICK: Yes, let's do that. I'll begin by describing the problem that the determinist faces. What he must do is explain how people can be morally responsible for what they do, even though everything they do is caused.

DANIEL: Can you explain why you think that is a problem for the determinist?

FREDERICK: Yes. If everything we do were caused, as you say, then nothing we do could be different. And if nothing we

do could be different, we would not be morally responsible for anything we do. To be morally responsible for something, there has to be more than one thing we can do. It can't be that we *have* to do something. Do you agree to these things?

DANIEL: Yes.

FREDERICK: Then it follows that we are not morally responsible for anything we do if everything we do is caused.

DANIEL: Yes, I agree. Determinism and moral responsibility are incompatible. A person can't consistently believe both. But that's not a problem for the determinist unless there are decisive reasons for thinking that we actually are morally responsible for what we do. After all, the determinist can simply deny that we are ever morally responsible.

FREDERICK: No, he can't do that, because there are decisive reasons for believing in moral responsibility.

DANIEL: My response to that is to say that the evidence for determinism is so strong that we should believe it even if that means denying moral responsibility. What you think are good reasons for believing in moral responsibility really aren't, because the evidence for determinism shows that we aren't morally responsible for anything we do.

FREDERICK: That certainly is an extreme position to take. It goes against what nearly everyone believes about human nature, and it goes against plain and evident facts that show we are morally responsible beings.

DANIEL: To what facts are you referring?

FREDERICK: I'm referring to praise, blame, reward, punishment, guilt, remorse, the criminal justice system, and morality. All of these presuppose that we are morally responsible for what we do.

DANIEL: No, they don't presuppose that. They make sense even though everything we do is caused by happenings over which we have no control and even though we are not morally responsible for anything we do.

FREDERICK: I don't see how that can be true. It makes no sense to blame or punish someone for something he does unless he is morally responsible for it. And it makes no sense to judge the rightness or wrongness of something a person does unless he has control over it. How can you deny these obvious truths?

DANIEL: I don't think they are obvious truths. In fact, I think they are wrong, because the whole point of blaming and punishing people is to deter them from hurting other people and to protect other people from being hurt. Furthermore, morality is nothing more than a system of likes and dislikes. Since deterring, protecting, liking and disliking are all compatible with determinism and the denial of moral responsibility, it follows that blame, punishment and morality are all compatible with determinism and the denial of moral responsibility.

FREDERICK: Can you explain that in more detail?

### BLAME AND PUNISHMENT

DANIEL: Yes. I'll start with the first point. When we blame someone for doing something wrong or punish him for breaking the law, we do so because we want to prevent him from doing it again and because we want to prevent other people from doing it at all. When we praise someone for doing something good or reward him for doing something beneficial to society, we do so because we want to encourage him and others to do it again. These motives are the reason we prosecute people who break the law, and they are the reason we discipline our children and praise them for their achievements.

FREDERICK: How is that supposed to refute my claim that blame and punishment make sense only if people are morally responsible for what they do?

DANIEL: Encouraging people to act in certain ways, trying to change their behavior patterns, and preventing them from hurting others do not presuppose that people are morally responsible for what they do. These activities presuppose only that there is a strong probability that the person to whom they are directed will be caused to act differently. That's why it is not pointless to blame a person for his misdeeds, and why it is pointless to blame a rock for breaking a window, even though neither the person nor the rock is morally responsible for anything he or it does. All of this means that blaming, praising and punishing make sense even though everything we do is caused by happenings over which we have no control and even though we are not morally responsible beings.

FREDERICK: It sounds to me as if you would disagree with

Clarence Darrow's strategy of using determinism to try to save his clients from being hanged.

DANIEL: Yes, that's right. Although I agree with Darrow's belief in determinism, I don't think determinism can be used as an excuse to avoid blame and punishment.

FREDERICK: I certainly agree with you that we use blame and punishment to get people to change their behavior and to protect other people from harm. But if that is all there is to blaming and punishing, then I think you have missed a crucial requirement for their legitimate use.

DANIEL: What requirement are you referring to?

FREDERICK: The avoidance requirement, which says that a person should be blamed or punished for doing something only if he could have avoided doing it. Suppose, for instance, that a person is forced at gun-point to drive the getaway car in a bank robbery, or suppose that a person accidentally trips and knocks down a bystander whose arm is broken as a result of the encounter. In neither case could the person have avoided what he did. So in neither case would it be legitimate to blame him and to say he has done something morally wrong. Nor would it be legitimate to prosecute the first person for complicity in a bank robbery, and the second for assault and battery. This avoidance requirement is so widely accepted that any conception of blaming and punishing that denies it should be seriously questioned. And, also, you will notice that the avoidance requirement makes blame and punishment incompatible with determinism. If determinism were true, then nothing we do could be different; everything we do would have to be done and could not be avoided. So if determinism were true, blaming and punishing should be abandoned because they would violate the avoidance requirement.

DANIEL: I agree with you that determinism entails that nothing we do can be avoided. But that doesn't mean blame and punishment should be abandoned, because the avoidance principle is not a requirement for their legitimate use. The only requirements are that the behavior in question be undesirable, and that the blaming or punishing help prevent that kind of behavior. These requirements are not met in your two examples, because in neither case would blame and punishment help prevent people from doing

those things. For instance, we don't punish someone who accidentally trips and knocks down a bystander, because blaming and punishing would not deter him or other people from tripping again. By contrast, blaming and punishing would deter people from deliberately knocking down other people.

FREDERICK: How can blame and punishment deter people from doing something unless people are able to avoid doing it?

DANIEL: Blame and punishment deter people from doing certain things because they cause people's *later* actions to be different from their former actions. Blame and punishment do not presuppose that the *very* action for which a person is blamed could have been avoided.

FREDERICK: If punishment is permissible even though people are not able to avoid what they do, then how can there be a distinction between punishing someone for something he has done and treating him for an illness he has? Isn't the difference between these two just that in the one case a person could have avoided doing what he did and that in the other case a person could not have avoided getting ill? Doesn't your conception of punishing obliterate this distinction between punishment and treatment?

DANIEL: Yes, that's right. Punishing and treating are exactly the same kind of activities. Neither one presupposes moral responsibility or the ability to have acted differently. Both of them presuppose only that a certain kind of behavior is desirable and that there is a reasonable chance of maintaining it by the punishment or treatment of behavior that deviates from it. Both of these presuppositions are compatible with determinism and the denial of moral responsibility.

FREDERICK: I don't see how you can deny the distinction between punishment and treatment. It is such an essential part of our lives that denying it seems patently false. For example, we put insane people into mental hospitals to be treated, and we put criminals into prisons to be punished. We don't punish insane people, because they can't help doing what they do. We don't even blame them. We just feel pity. But we do punish criminals, because they could have avoided what they did.

DANIEL: The distinction you are referring to is between those

kinds of treatment that will deter and change behavior and those that will not. Putting sick persons and insane people into prison will not change their condition, whereas giving them medicine or treating them in mental hospitals will. Putting criminals into prison will deter and change criminal behavior. We call one of these kinds of activities "treating" and the other "punishing," even though neither one presupposes moral responsibility or the ability to act differently.

FREDERICK: But surely there is a difference between being responsible and not being responsible. We commonly suppose that people are responsible for criminal behavior but are not responsible for getting sick. Your denial of moral responsibility obliterates this plain and evident distinction.

DANIEL: I agree with you that there is a distinction between those two cases, but I think it can be accounted for perfectly well by the notion of *causal* responsibility, which is different from *moral* responsibility. We are responsible for criminal behavior because we ourselves cause it, but we are not responsible for getting sick because we do not cause it. We don't need to invoke moral responsibility to explain the difference between these cases.

FREDERICK: Oh yes we do, because causal responsibility is not enough to justify blame and punishment. These are legitimate only if someone has done something wrong.

DANIEL: Again, I agree with you—blaming and punishing make sense only if someone has done something wrong. But just because someone has done something wrong doesn't mean that he is morally responsible for it.

FREDERICK: How can that possibly be so?

DANIEL: Saying that someone has done something wrong is the same as expressing a dislike of it. But disliking something has nothing to do with moral responsibility.

FREDERICK: Can you explain what you mean?

#### MORALITY

DANIEL: Yes. When people think of morality, they usually think of objective, eternal principles which apply to all people. "It is wrong to torture people just for the fun of it" and "It is better to love than to hate" are two examples. These statements are supposed to express objective truths—they are true regardless of what we like or dislike. In my conception of morality, however, these statements

merely express our likes and dislikes. The first one expresses our dislike of torture, and the second expresses our liking of love more than of hate. Neither one expresses an objective, eternal principle which would exist even if people had no likes or dislikes. That's because there are no such principles. There are only likes and dislikes.

FREDERICK: Is that why you think that morality makes sense even though determinism is true, and even though people are not morally responsible for anything they do?

DANIEL: That's right. Our likes and dislikes can exist even though everything we do is caused by happenings over which we have no control.

FREDERICK: Why do you think your conception of morality is correct?

DANIEL: Because it is the conception of morality that best fits in with determinism. It doesn't make sense to say that people have obligations if they cannot avoid doing what they do. But it does make sense to say that people do what other people like or dislike, even though they cannot avoid doing what they do.

FREDERICK: Since your conception of morality seems to conflict with what people usually believe about morality, I would like to ask you a few questions about it.

DANIEL: Okay.

FREDERICK: If you are right in saying that morality is the same as a system of likes and dislikes, then conflicting moral beliefs would be nothing more than differences in what we like. If I say "Wars are always wrong" and someone else says "Wars are sometimes right," we would only be expressing different feelings toward war. We would not be asserting incompatible moral statements—one of which is true and the other of which is false—because truth and falsity do not apply to feelings.

DANIEL: Yes, that's right. On my view of morality, differences in moral beliefs are differences in what we like.

FREDERICK: Well, that goes against our ordinary view of morality, which says that when two people disagree, one of them is right and the other is wrong. So my question is, How can you reconcile your conception of morality with the common belief that people say contradictory things when they disagree about moral matters?

- DANIEL: I don't reconcile the two because I reject the common view. We never do say contradictory things when we utter different moral statements. Moral statements that appear to be contradictory are really expressions of different tastes, which are no more contradictory than two people liking different kinds of food.
- FREDERICK: But don't people think of themselves as saying something that is true or false when they utter a moral statement such as "He should not have hit him"?
- DANIEL: People may think this, but they are wrong if they do, because in actuality they are merely expressing a dislike of one person's having hit another. And dislikes are no more true or false than trees or rivers.
- FREDERICK: Suppose someone were to ask you whether or not your likes are good. Would you understand what he was asking?
- DANIEL: Yes, certainly.
- FREDERICK: Then it follows that morality is something more than mere likes and dislikes. When a person says that his likes are good, he is not merely expressing a like of his own likes. That would be absurd. He is saying something true or false about his own likes.
- DANIEL: No, in this case, too, he would be expressing a like. There's nothing absurd in expressing a like of our own likes.
- FREDERICK: Don't people directly apprehend moral principles? Don't we all see intuitively that it is wrong to hurt people just for the fun of it?
- DANIEL: If we did have special intuitions of moral principles, we would all agree on what is right and wrong. We don't agree, however. So it is hard to escape the conclusion that there aren't any objective moral truths, and that morality is solely a matter of taste.
- FREDERICK: How can your conception of morality account for guilt and remorse? Aren't these based on a violation of objective moral laws?
- DANIEL: There is no such thing as guilt if you mean by it a violation of objective moral laws. And there is no such thing as remorse if you mean by it a sorrow for having violated an objective moral law. However, there is guilt if it means "not having done what other people would have liked for you to have done"; and there is remorse if it

- means "sorrow for having done what other people disliked."
- FREDERICK: Your answers to my questions show how radical your conception of morality is. They demonstrate the lengths to which a determinist must go just to maintain his belief in determinism. If determinism entails all that, I think it should be rejected.
- DANIEL: From my perspective, it is really the other way around. Your rejection of the evidence for determinism, as demonstrated in your remarks near the beginning of our entire discussion on free will and determinism, shows to what lengths a free-willist must go just to maintain his belief in free will. If free will and moral responsibility entail the denial of determinism, I think they should be rejected, no matter what the consequences are for our conception of morality.
- FREDERICK: What do you think of all this, Carolyn?
- WHETHER DETERMINISM IS COMPATIBLE  
WITH MORAL RESPONSIBILITY
- CAROLYN: I don't think that a person has to say what Daniel has been saying just to maintain his belief in determinism. I think a person can believe in determinism, as I do, without also denying moral responsibility, as Daniel does.
- FREDERICK: That certainly is an interesting statement.
- CAROLYN: I agree with Daniel that the evidence for determinism is so strong that we have to believe that determinism is true. And I agree with you, Frederick, that the legitimacy of blame, punishment and morality shows that we are morally responsible for what we do. Neither determinism nor moral responsibility can be denied without denying plain and evident facts.
- FREDERICK: I take it you believe that moral responsibility is compatible with determinism. Is that correct?
- CAROLYN: Yes. A person can believe both without contradicting himself.
- FREDERICK: I would like to see you make a case for that, because it seems to me that they are contradictory. Determinism entails that people cannot act differently from the way they actually act, and moral responsibility presupposes that people can act differently from the way they actually act.
- CAROLYN: I agree with you that moral responsibility presup-

- poses that people can act differently, but I don't think that this ability to act differently conflicts with determinism. What we mean when we say that we can act differently is that no person or circumstance compels us to act as we do or prevents us from doing something different. And what we do might not be compelled by any person or circumstance even though it is caused by our own beliefs, desires and choices.
- FREDERICK: Why do you define the ability to act differently in that way?
- CAROLYN: I define the ability to act differently in that way because that is what we normally mean by it. For instance, a bank robber who could have refrained from robbing a bank is one who was not forced to act as he did. A check forger who could have refrained from writing a bad check is one who was not forced to forge another person's signature—and so on. The typical everyday meaning of "being able to act differently" is "not being forced to act as one does or not being prevented from acting differently." It is this typical sense of the ability to act differently which is required by moral responsibility and which is compatible with determinism.
- FREDERICK: How exactly is it compatible with determinism?
- CAROLYN: Our actions can be caused by our beliefs, desires and choices *and* at the same time be uncaused by any person or circumstance. The case of the check forger illustrates this nicely. He could have refrained from writing a bad check because no one forced him to do it, yet his doing it was caused by his belief that he could get away with it and by his desire for more money. He was morally responsible for what he did even though his action had a cause.
- FREDERICK: You are certainly right in saying that moral responsibility would be compatible with determinism if it presupposed only your sense of being able to act differently.
- CAROLYN: Do you disagree with me?
- FREDERICK: Yes. I think moral responsibility presupposes a different sense of the ability to act differently—a sense that conflicts with determinism.
- CAROLYN: Can you explain that sense to me?
- FREDERICK: Yes. I think moral responsibility presupposes that

- we can act differently even if all of the immediately prior conditions are the same. This means that moral responsibility conflicts with determinism, because saying that an occurrence can be different even if all of the immediately prior conditions are the same is identical with saying that the occurrence is uncaused. You explained this when we were discussing the evidence for determinism.
- CAROLYN: Yes, that's right.
- FREDERICK: Being able to act differently in my sense means that nothing inside or outside a person causes him to act as he does. He can act differently even if everything in his brain, subconscious mind, and external environment is the same. In other words, he has genuine alternatives open to him. If he didn't have genuine alternatives open to him, there would be only one thing he could do—in which case he certainly should not be held morally responsible for what he does.
- CAROLYN: Perhaps we should consider a few examples to see exactly what moral responsibility presupposes.
- FREDERICK: That's a good idea.
- CAROLYN: First, let's take the case of a person who has been caught stealing. If we ask why it is that we think of him as being morally responsible for what he has done, I think the answer is that we assume that he knew he was doing something wrong or at least that he ought to have known he was doing something wrong, and we assume that he was not forced to steal. We don't consider *all* of the immediately prior conditions, as you say we should, because some of them are entirely irrelevant to whether or not he is to be blamed. For instance, we don't even think about what is going on in his brain or subconscious mind. We know he is morally responsible for stealing without having to take him to a neurologist, physiologist and psychiatrist. If you were right in saying that he is morally responsible for stealing only if he can act differently even if *all* of the immediately prior conditions were to remain the same, we would never be able to tell that he is morally responsible for doing what he did. But we know that he is—and that's because moral responsibility presupposes only that he was not compelled to steal, which we can ascertain quite readily.

FREDERICK: It presupposes more than that. If something in the person's brain or subconscious mind caused him to steal, then even though he was not compelled or forced to do what he did, he would, nevertheless, be unable to act any differently from the way he actually acted. And certainly he should not be blamed, punished or held morally accountable for stealing if he could not have done anything else but steal.

CAROLYN: Here's another example. Suppose one night your garage burns down. After investigating, the fire department discovers that it had been set on fire, and several days later the police apprehend the person who did it. Would your indignation be softened if you reflected on the fact that his behavior was determined by a chain of occurrences stretching back prior to his birth, even if you knew that he had deliberately, maliciously and voluntarily set fire to your garage? I think not. What would soften your indignation toward him would be the discovery that he was an otherwise harmless youth who had been goaded and taunted into setting fire to some garage that night by a gang of rowdy toughs.

FREDERICK: If I knew that his action was caused by an endless chain of occurrences, I would not blame him for what he did, because he could not have acted differently.

CAROLYN: Here is one last example. Suppose you were a judge, and a defendant who was accused of assaulting and injuring his neighbor said to you, "Mr. Judge, I am innocent of this charge, because my early childhood experience, upbringing and inherited character traits have all made it such that I could not have acted any differently than I did. Only if something were different in the immediately prior conditions, in my background or in my gene structure could I have avoided assaulting and injuring my neighbor. Therefore, I should not be blamed, punished or held accountable for what I did." What would you think?

FREDERICK: I would think that his defense is just as inappropriate as Clarence Darrow's defense of Leopold and Loeb.

CAROLYN: Why?

FREDERICK: Because although the defendant is right in thinking that he should not be blamed if his crime is determined, he is wrong in assuming that what he did was determined. I don't see how that could possibly be shown.

CAROLYN: I think any judge who reacted in that way would be basing blame, punishment and accountability on an insecure foundation. He would be basing these on the mere hope that our actions could be proven to be uncaused—a hope that has become more and more unfounded as science has provided causal explanations of increasing amounts of human behavior. What we really base blame, punishment and accountability on, as my examples show, is something entirely different. We don't have to investigate the causal history of an action before deciding whether or not we should blame a person for doing it.

FREDERICK: Yes we do. If a person's heredity and early environment make it difficult for him to avoid committing a certain kind of crime, we should soften our blame. For example, a person who has a neurotic impulse to steal probably has had his character molded by circumstances over which he has no control. We shouldn't blame him for what he does, because he can't help it.

CAROLYN: We do sometimes use a person's heredity and early environment as mitigating conditions for blame. But that doesn't mean we should do so *all* of the time. We surely shouldn't refuse to blame the person who deliberately and voluntarily set fire to your garage, even though we can trace the causal history of his action to conditions in his early environment.

FREDERICK: If it is sometimes right to mitigate blame because of a person's heredity or early environment, then it is always right to do so. My robot-person example illustrates this perfectly. You may recall that this example involves an ingenious neurosurgeon who has implanted a device into a certain person's brain. The device causes all of the person's thoughts, desires, choices and actions. Nothing he thinks about, wants to do, chooses and does can be any different from what actually happens. Now let me ask a few questions. Would the robot-person be morally responsible for anything he does? Would we be justified in blaming and punishing him for his misdeeds? Would morality and guilt apply to him? I have asked these questions of people, and invariably I have received a "No" answer. That is because none of the categories we commonly apply to people apply to this robot-person. It makes no sense to say that he should have done one thing rather than another, because he could not have done the other

thing. To blame him for doing something illegal is illegitimate, because he is not a moral being. Of course, we might not like what he does and we might want to restrain him from acting in certain ways. But that would not be punishment, because punishment requires that the person punished be a moral agent who has the ability to act differently. And notice, too, that the robot-person fulfills the requirements that you say are necessary for holding someone morally responsible. No one forces him to act as he does, and no one prevents him from acting otherwise, even though the device inside him causes him to do everything he does. This shows, I think, that the sense of "being able to act differently" required by moral responsibility involves something more than not being forced to act as one does. It also involves the ability to act differently, even if everything prior to our action, including what goes on inside us, were to remain the same. This ability is required if we are to have genuine alternatives, which are necessary if blame, punishment, morality and guilt are to apply to people.

CAROLYN: Your example is very persuasive. Unfortunately, its persuasiveness comes from the fact that it neglects entirely our everyday practice of blaming people and making moral judgments about what they do. Our everyday practice ignores the question of whether or not we are all robots. All that it asks is whether or not a person knew what he was doing, and whether or not he was made to do what he did against his will or was prevented from doing something he wanted to do. We all could be robots and still legitimately ask these questions, which means that we all could be robots and still legitimately distinguish between actions for which we are morally responsible and actions for which we are not morally responsible.

FREDERICK: That sounds most paradoxical. If everything we do were caused, I don't see how morality and blame could apply to us. This is shown even more persuasively by my before-birth argument.

CAROLYN: That's the argument you used when we were discussing the compatibility of free will and determinism, right?

FREDERICK: Yes. It says that if determinism were true, everything we do would be caused by a chain of happenings that stretches back to before our births. Since we have no

control over what happened prior to our births, we would have no control over what we do now. Everything we do, think, choose and desire would have to be exactly as it is. This means that if determinism were true, we could not be held responsible for anything. Moral obligations would not apply to us, and the distinction between right and wrong would be obliterated.

CAROLYN: My response to that is the same as my response to your robot-person example. We apply blame, punishment and morality in everyday life without regard to what has happened prior to our births. We do not absolve people of moral responsibility when we realize that all of their actions are caused.

FREDERICK: Don't we refuse to apply the distinction between right and wrong to the actions of animals, birds and insects, on the grounds that they are determined to act as they do? Why should it be any different for people, if everything they do is determined?

CAROLYN: The reason we don't apply the distinction between right and wrong to the actions of animals, birds and insects is that they have no knowledge of right and wrong. Whether or not actions are caused has nothing to do with applying moral concepts to the actions.

FREDERICK: But isn't it senseless to say that what we do is right or wrong if it has to be exactly as it is?

CAROLYN: It would be senseless to say that what we do is right or wrong *if* we were forced to act against our wills all the time or were continually prevented from acting as we wish. But we aren't. So right and wrong can apply to our actions even though they are all caused. The causes of our actions—beliefs, desires, choices, brain states, unconscious motives—don't *force* us to act against our wills or prevent us from acting as we wish. People and circumstances do that.

FREDERICK: Isn't it easier to see how people can be morally responsible for their actions if they are uncaused rather than caused?

CAROLYN: No. In fact it is just the reverse. It is easier to see how people can be morally responsible for their actions if they are caused rather than uncaused.

FREDERICK: How can that be so?

CAROLYN: If something we do is uncaused, then, as we have both agreed, it can be different even if all of the immedi-

ately prior circumstances were to remain the same. This means that if something we do is uncaused, it can be different even if our beliefs, desires and choices were to remain the same, because these are part of the circumstances that exist immediately prior to our actions. Consequently, uncaused actions would be entirely unconnected to our choices, beliefs and desires. Our actions would be purely arbitrary. We might just as well have done something different, even if we had not chosen to do so or had not believed it to be in our best interests. Now I ask you, how can we be held accountable for actions such as these?

FREDERICK: I am willing to admit that our actions are caused by our beliefs, desires and choices. But that wouldn't remove responsibility from our actions unless the causes were themselves caused by an endless chain of happenings. This is not the case, however, because our actions are the products of our free and uncaused decisions.

CAROLYN: That doesn't answer my argument, because the very same things I just said about actions also apply to uncaused decisions, which you say cause our actions. If a decision is uncaused, it would be entirely unconnected to our character traits and personality patterns. Our making a decision would be purely arbitrary. We might just as well have decided differently, even if nothing in our character or personality were different. How can we be responsible for a decision that is disassociated from ourselves in this way?

FREDERICK: We can be held accountable for uncaused decisions because we are confronted with genuine alternatives when we make them. If our decisions were caused, and the causes caused, and so on, we would not be confronted with genuine alternatives. This makes it easier, for me at least, to see how people can be morally responsible for their decisions if they are uncaused rather than caused.

DANIEL: It doesn't look as if you two are ever going to agree with each other.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

CAROLYN: Maybe we should end our discussion of free will and determinism. It's getting rather late.

DANIEL: Have we talked about all of the issues?

FREDERICK: No, but we have talked about some of the important ones.

CAROLYN: We don't seem to have come any closer to agreement. In fact, we seem to have solidified our disagreements.

DANIEL: Since people are continually disagreeing about the answer to the problem, one wonders whether it is possible for anyone ever to know what the right answer is.

FREDERICK: I would say that it is possible. People agree on what general criteria should be used in evaluating the truth of beliefs. And these general criteria can be used in deciding whether determinism is true or whether the free will position is true.

DANIEL: What general criteria do you have in mind?

FREDERICK: A belief has to be in agreement with facts and experiences of every kind; it cannot conflict with other well-established beliefs, and it cannot be self-contradictory.

DANIEL: You are certainly right in saying that people agree to those criteria. But the crucial question is how to apply them. One person might think that his position is true because it conforms to the criteria better than the opposite position. And another person might think that the opposite position is true because it conforms to the criteria better than the first position. So how can we tell that a certain position conforms to the criteria better than another position?

FREDERICK: That would be a matter of patiently and carefully examining the evidence.

DANIEL: And when you do that, what do you think is the correct solution to the problem of free will and determinism?

FREDERICK: I think the free will position is correct.

DANIEL: And I think the determinist position is correct.

CAROLYN: It looks as if we'll never settle the issue.

DANIEL: That reminds me of the punishment that the fallen angels received in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which was to discuss the problem of free will and determinism forever.

FREDERICK: Couldn't they stop?

DANIEL: No. Everything they said was determined.

FREDERICK: That seems absurd. What would be the point of their talking about whether or not people have free will if everything they said was determined?

DANIEL: So they could decide what the truth is.

FREDERICK: But that doesn't make sense if they have no free will.

CAROLYN: Perhaps we should stop our discussion before we get started all over again.

# Reading #4

## *Determinism, Freedom and Fate*

### *The story of Osmo*

Now then, let us make one further supposition, which will get us squarely into the philosophical issue these ideas are intended to introduce. Let us suppose that God has revealed a particular set of facts to a chosen scribe who, believing (correctly) that they came from God, wrote them all down. The facts in question then turned out to be all the more or less significant episodes in the life of some perfectly ordinary man named Osmo. Osmo was entirely unknown to the scribe, and in fact to just about everyone, but there was no doubt concerning whom all these facts were about, for the very first thing received by the scribe from God, was: "He of whom I speak is called Osmo." When the revelations reached a fairly voluminous bulk and appeared to be completed, the scribe arranged them in chronological order and assembled them into a book. He at first gave it the title *The Life of Osmo, as Given by God*, but thinking that people would take this to be some sort of joke, he dropped the reference to God.

The book was published, but attracted no attention whatsoever, because it appeared to be nothing more than a record of the dull life of a very plain man named Osmo. The scribe wondered, in fact, why God had chosen to convey such a mass of seemingly pointless trivia.

The book eventually found its way into various libraries, where it gathered dust until one day a high school teacher in Indiana, who rejoiced under the name of Osmo, saw a copy on the shelf. The title caught his eye. Curiously picking it up and blowing the dust off, he was thunderstruck by the opening sentence: "Osmo is born in Mercy Hospital in Auburn, Indiana, on June 6, 1942, of Finnish parentage, and after nearly losing his life from an attack of pneumonia at the age of five, he is enrolled in the St. James school there." Osmo turned pale. The book nearly fell from his hands. He thumbed back in excitement to discover who had written it. Nothing was given of its authorship nor, for that matter, of its publisher. His questions of the librarian produced no further information, he being as ignorant as Osmo of how the book came to be there.

So Osmo, with the book pressed tightly under his arm, dashed across the street for some coffee, thinking to compose himself and then examine this book with care. Meanwhile he glanced at a few more of its opening remarks, at the things said there about his difficulties with his younger sister, how he was slow in learning to read, of the summer on Mackinac Island, and so on. His emotions now somewhat quieted, Osmo began a close reading. He noticed that everything was expressed in the present tense, the way newspaper headlines are written.

For example, the text read, "Osmo is born in Mercy Hospital," instead of saying he *was* born there, and it recorded that he quarrels with his sister, is a slow student, is fitted with dental braces at age eight, and so on, all in the journalistic present tense. But the text itself made quite clear approximately when all these various things happened, for everything was in chronological order, and in any case each year of its subject's life constituted a separate chapter, and was so titled—"Osmo's Seventh Year," "Osmo's Eighth Year," and so on through the book.

Osmo became absolutely engrossed, to the extent that he forgot his original astonishment, bordering on panic, and for a while even lost his curiosity concerning authorship. He sat drinking coffee and reliving his childhood, much of which he had all but forgotten until the memories were revived by the book now before him. He had almost forgotten about the kitten, for example, and had entirely forgotten its name, until he read, in the chapter called "Osmo's Seventh Year," this observation: "Sobbing, Osmo takes Fluffy, now quite dead, to the garden, and buries her next to the rose bush." Ah yes! And then there was Louise, who sat next to him in the eighth grade—it was all right there. And how he got caught smoking one day. And how he felt when his father died. On and on. Osmo became so absorbed that he quite forgot the business of the day, until it occurred to him to turn to Chapter 26, to see what might be said there, he having just recently turned twenty-six. He had no sooner done so than his panic returned, for lo! what the book said was true! That it rains on his birthday for example, that his wife fails to give him the binoculars he had hinted he would like, that he receives a raise in salary shortly thereafter, and so on. Now how in God's name, Osmo pondered, could anyone know that, apparently before it had happened? For these were quite recent events, and the book had dust on it. Quickly moving on, Osmo came to this: "Sitting and reading in the coffee shop across from the library, Osmo, perspiring copiously, entirely forgets, until it is too late, that he is supposed to collect his wife at the hairdresser's at four." Oh my god! He had forgotten all about that. Yanking out his watch, Osmo discovered that it was nearly five o'clock—too late. She would be on her way home by now, and in a very sour mood.

Osmo's anguish at this discovery was nothing, though, compared to what the rest of the day held for him. He poured more coffee, and it now occurred to him to check the number of chapters in this amazing book. Only twenty-nine! But surely, he thought, that doesn't mean anything. How anyone could have gotten all this stuff down so far was puzzling enough, to be sure, but

no one on God's earth could possibly know in advance how long this or that man is going to live. (Only God could know that sort of thing, Osmo reflected.) So he read along; though not without considerable uneasiness and even depression, for the remaining three chapters were on the whole discouraging. He thought he had gotten that ulcer under control, for example. And he didn't see any reason to suppose his job was going to turn out that badly, or that he was really going to break a leg skiing; after all, he could just give up skiing. But then the book ended on a terribly dismal note. It said: "And Osmo, having taken Northwest flight 569 from O'Hare, perishes when the aircraft crashes on the runway at Fort Wayne, with considerable loss of life, a tragedy rendered the more calamitous by the fact that Osmo had neglected to renew his life insurance before the expiration of the grace period." And that was all. That was the end of the book.

So *that's* why it had only twenty-nine chapters. Some idiot thought he was going to get killed in a plane crash. But, Osmo thought, he just wouldn't get on that plane. And this would also remind him to keep his insurance in force.

(About three years later our hero, having boarded a flight for St. Paul, went berserk when the pilot announced they were going to land at Fort Wayne instead. According to one of the stewardesses he tried to hijack the aircraft and divert it to another airfield. The Civil Aeronautics Board cited the resulting disruptions as contributing to the crash that followed as the plane tried to land.)

#### Four questions

Osmo's extraordinary circumstances led him to embrace the doctrine of fatalism. Not quite completely, perhaps, for there he was, right up to the end, trying vainly to buck his fate—trying, in effect, to make a fool of God, though he did not know this, because he had no idea of the book's source. Still, he had the overwhelming evidence of his whole past life to make him think that everything was going to work out exactly as described in the book. It always had. It was, in fact, precisely this conviction that terrified him so.

But now let us ask these questions, in order to make Osmo's experiences more relevant to our own. First, why did he become, or nearly become, a fatalist? Second, just what did his fatalism amount to? Third, was his belief justified in terms of the evidence he had? And finally, is that belief justified in terms of the evidence we have—or in other words, should we be fatalists too? This last, of course, is the important metaphysical question, but we have to approach it through the others.

*Why did Osmo become a fatalist?* Osmo became a fatalist because there existed a set of true statements about the details of his life, both past and future, and he came to know what some of these statements were and to believe them, including many concerning his future. That is the whole of it.

No theological ideas entered into his conviction, nor any presuppositions about causal determinism, the coercion of his actions by causes, or anything of this sort. The foundations of Osmo's fatalism were entirely in logic and epistemology, having only to do with truth and knowledge. Ideas about God did not enter in, for he never suspected that God was the ultimate source of those statements. And at no point did he think God was making him do what he did. All he was concerned about was that someone seemed somehow to *know* what he had done and was going to do.

*What, then, did Osmo believe?* He did not, it should be noted, believe that certain things were going to happen to him, *no matter what*. That does not express a logically coherent belief. He did not think he was in danger of perishing in an airplane crash even in case he did not get into any airplane, for example, or that he was going to break his leg skiing, whether he went skiing or not. No one believes what he considers to be plainly impossible. If anyone believes that a given event is going to happen, he does not doubt that those things necessary for its occurrence are going to happen too. The expression, "no matter what," by means of which some philosophers have sought an easy and even childish refutation of fatalism, is accordingly highly inappropriate in any description of the fatalist conviction.

Osmo's fatalism was simply the realization that the things described in the book were unavoidable.

Of course we are all fatalists in this sense about some things, and the metaphysical question is whether this familiar attitude should not be extended to everything. We know the sun will rise tomorrow, for example, and there is nothing we can do about it. Each of us knows he is sooner or later going to die, too, and there is nothing to be done about that either. We normally do not know just when, of course, but it is mercifully so! For otherwise we would simply sit checking off the days as they passed, with growing despair, like a man condemned to the gallows and knowing the hour set for his execution. The tides ebb and flow, and heavens revolve, the seasons follow in order, generations arise and pass, and no one speaks of taking preventive measures. With respect to those things each of us recognizes as beyond his control, we are of necessity fatalists.

The question of fatalism is simply: Of all the things that



happen in the world, which, if any, are avoidable? And the philosophical fatalist replies: None of them. They never were. Some of them only seemed so.

*Was Osmo's fatalism justified?* Of course it was. When he could sit right there and read a true description of those parts of his life that had not yet been lived, it would be idle to suggest to him that his future might, nonetheless, contain alternative possibilities. The only doubts Osmo had were whether those statements could really be true. But here he had the proof of his own experience, as one by one they were tested. Whenever he tried to prevent what was set forth, he of course failed. Such failure, over and over, of even the most herculean efforts, with never a single success, must surely suggest, sooner or later, that he was *destined* to fail. Even to the end, when Osmo tried so desperately to save himself from the destruction described in the book, his effort was totally in vain—as he should have realized it was going to be had he really known that what was said there was true. No power in heaven or earth can render false a statement that is true. It has never been done, and never will be.

*Is the doctrine of fatalism, then, true?* This amounts to asking whether our circumstances are significantly different from Osmo's. Of course we cannot read our own biographies the way he could. Only men who become famous ever have their lives recorded, and even so, it is always in retrospect. This is unfortunate. It is too bad that someone with sufficient knowledge—God, for example—cannot set down the lives of great men in advance, so that their achievements can be appreciated better by their contemporaries, and indeed, by their predecessors—their parents, for instance. But mortals do not have the requisite knowledge, and if there is any god who does, he seems to keep it to himself.

None of this matters, as far as our own fatalism is concerned. For the important thing to note is that, of the two considerations that explain Osmo's fatalism, only one of them was philosophically relevant, and that one applies to us no less than to him. The two considerations were: (1) there existed a set of true statements about his life, both past and future, and (2) he came to know what those statements were and to believe them. Now the second of these two considerations explains why, as a matter of psychological fact, Osmo became fatalistic, but it has nothing to do with the validity of that point of view. Its validity is assured by (1) alone. It was not the fact that the statements happened to be written down that rendered the things they described unavoidable: that had nothing to do with it at all. Nor was it the fact that, because they had been written, Osmo could read them.

His reading them and coming to believe them likewise had nothing to do with the inevitability of what they described. This was ensured simply by there being such a set of statements, whether written or not, whether read by anyone or not, and whether or not known to be true. All that is required is that they should be true.

Each of us has but one possible past, described by that totality of statements about us in the past tense, each of which happens to be true. No one ever thinks of rearranging things there; it is simply accepted as given. But so also, each of us has but one possible future, described by that totality of statements about oneself in the future tense, each of which happens to be true. The sum of these constitutes one's biography. Part of it has been lived. The main outlines of it can still be seen, in retrospect, though most of its details are obscure. The other part has not been lived, though it most assuredly is going to be, in exact accordance with that set of statements just referred to. Some of its outlines can already be seen, in prospect, but it is on the whole more obscure than the part belonging to the past. We have at best only premonitory glimpses of it. It is no doubt for this reason that not all of this part, the part that awaits us, is perceived as given, and men do sometimes speak absurdly of altering it—as though what the future holds, as identified by any true statement in the future tense, might after all *not* hold.

Osmo's biography was all expressed in the present tense because all that mattered was that the things referred to were real events; it did not matter to what part of time they belonged. His past consisted of those things that preceded his reading of the book, and he simply accepted it as given. He was not tempted to revise what was said there, for he was sure it was true. But it took the book to make him realize that his future was also something given. It was equally pointless for him to try to revise what was said there, for it, too, was true. As the past contains what has happened, the future contains what will happen, and neither contains, in addition to these things, various other things that did not and will not happen.

Of course we know relatively little of what the future contains. Some things we know. We know the sun will go on rising and setting, for example, that taxes will be levied and wars rage, that men will continue to be callous and greedy, and that people will be murdered and robbed. It is just the details that remain to be discovered. But the same is true of the past; it is only a matter of degree. When I meet a total stranger I do not know, and will probably never know, what his past has been, beyond certain obvious things—that he had a mother, and things of this sort. I know nothing of the

*Richard Taylor*

particulars of that vast realm of fact that is unique to his past. And the same for his future, with only this difference—that all men are strangers to me as far as their futures are concerned, and here I am even a stranger to myself.

Yet there is one thing I know concerning any stranger's past and the past of everything under the sun; namely, that whatever it might hold, there is nothing anyone can do about it now. What has happened cannot be undone. The mere fact that it has happened guarantees this.

And so it is, by the same token, of the future of everything under the sun.

Whatever the future might hold, there is nothing anyone can do about it now. What will happen cannot be altered. The mere fact that it is going to happen guarantees this.

case where the cause of the action is found in things external to the agent when he contributes nothing to the result. But it may happen that actions, though, abstractly considered, involuntary, are deliberately chosen at a given time and in given circumstances in preference to a given alternative. In that case, their origin being in the agent, these actions must be pronounced voluntary in the particular circumstances and because they are preferred to their alternatives. In themselves they are involuntary, yet they have more of the voluntary about them, since conduct is a sequence of particular acts and the particular things done in the circumstances we have supposed are voluntary. But when it comes to saying which of two alternative lines of action should be preferred—then difficulties arise. For the differences in particular cases are many.

If it should be argued that the pleasurable and honourable things exercise constraint upon us from without, and therefore actions performed under their influence are compulsory, it may be replied that this would make every action compulsory. For we all have some pleasurable or honourable motive in everything we do. Secondly, people acting under compulsion and against their will find it painful, whereas those whose actions are inspired by the pleasurable and the honourable find that these actions are accompanied by pleasure. In the third place it is absurd to accuse external influences instead of ourselves when we fall an easy prey to such inducements and to lay the blame for all dishonourable deeds on the seductions of pleasure, while claiming for ourselves credit for any fine thing we have done. It appears, then, that an action is compulsory only when it is caused by something external to itself which is not influenced by anything contributed by the person under compulsion.

Then there are acts done through igno-

rance. Any act of this nature is other than voluntary, but it is involuntary only when it causes the doer subsequent pain and regret. For a man who has been led into some action by ignorance and yet has no regrets, while he cannot be said to have been a voluntary agent—he did not know what he was doing—nevertheless cannot be said to have acted involuntarily, since he feels no compunction. We therefore draw a distinction. (a) When a man who has done something as a result of ignorance is sorry for it, we take it that he has acted involuntarily. (b) When such a man is not sorry, the case is different and we shall have to call him a 'non-voluntary' agent. For it is better that he should have a distinctive name in order to mark the distinction. Note, further, that there is evidently a difference between acting in consequence of ignorance and acting in ignorance. When a man is drunk or in passion his actions are not supposed to be the result of ignorance but of one or other of these conditions. But, as he does not realize what he is doing, he is acting in ignorance. To be sure every bad man is ignorant of what he ought to do and refrain from doing, and it is just this ignorance that makes people unjust and otherwise wicked. But when we use the word 'involuntary' we do not apply it in a case where the agent does not know what is for his own good. For involuntary acts are not the consequence of ignorance when the ignorance is shown in our choice of ends; what does result from such ignorance is a completely vicious condition. No, what I mean is not general ignorance—which is what gives ground for censure—but particular ignorance, ignorance that is to say of the particular circumstances or the particular persons concerned. In such cases there may be room for pity and pardon, because a man who acts in ignorance of such details is an involuntary agent. . . .

An involuntary act being one per-

formed under compulsion or as the result of ignorance, a voluntary act would seem to be one of which the origin or efficient cause lies in the agent, he knowing the particular circumstances in which he is acting. I believe it to be an error to say that acts occasioned by anger or desire are involuntary. For in the first place if we maintain this we shall have to give up the view that any of the lower animals, or even children, are capable of voluntary action. In the second place, when we act from desire or anger are none of our actions voluntary? Or are our fine actions voluntary, our ignoble actions, involuntary? It is an absurd distinction, since the agent is one and the same person. It is surely paradoxical to describe as 'involuntary' acts inspired by sentiments which we quite properly desire to have. There are some things at which

we ought to feel angry, and others which we ought to desire—health, for instance, and the acquisition of knowledge. Thirdly, people assume that what is involuntary must be painful and what falls in with our own wishes must be pleasant. Fourthly, what difference is there in point of voluntariness between wrong actions which are calculated and wrong actions which are done on impulse? Both are to be avoided; and the further reflection suggests itself, that the irrational emotions are no less typically human than our considered judgment. Whence it follows that actions inspired by anger or desire are equally typical of the human being who performs them. Therefore to classify these actions as 'involuntary' is surely a very strange proceeding. . . .

## #READING 5 (important for SAC)



BARON D'HOLBACH

### Are We Cogs in the Universe?

BARON D'HOLBACH (1723-1789) was a French aristocrat during the enlightenment who believed in a thoroughgoing materialism. He argued that the universe was nothing but "matter in motion" and human behavior nothing but the result of the deterministic behavior of this matter. He argues his version of "hard" determinism in the selection that follows.

IN whatever manner man is considered, he is connected to universal nature, and submitted to the necessary and immutable laws that she imposes on all beings she contains, according to their peculiar essences or to the respective properties with which, without consulting them, she endows each particular species. Man's life is a line that nature commands

him to describe upon the surface of the earth, without his ever being able to swerve from it, even for an instant. He is born without his own consent; his organization does in nowise depend upon himself; his ideas come to him involuntarily; his habits are in the power of those who cause him to contract them; he is unceasingly modified by causes, whether visible

or concealed, over which he has no control, which necessarily regulate his mode of existence, give the hue to his way of thinking, and determine his manner of acting. He is good or bad, happy or miserable, wise or foolish, reasonable or irrational, without his will being for anything in these various states. Nevertheless, in spite of the shackles by which he is bound, it is pretended he is a free agent, or that independent of the causes by which he is moved, he determines his own will, and regulates his own condition.

However slender the foundation of his opinion, of which everything ought to point out to him the error, it is current at this day and passes for an incontestable truth with a great number of people, otherwise extremely enlightened: it is the basis of religion, which supposing relations between man and the unknown being she has placed above nature, has been incapable of imagining how man could merit reward or deserve punishment from this being, if he was not a free agent. Society has been believed interested in his system; because an idea has gone abroad, that if all the actions of man were to be contemplated as necessary, the right of punishing those who injure their associates would no longer exist. At length human vanity accommodated itself to a hypothesis which, unquestionably, appears to distinguish man from all other physical beings, by assigning to him the special privilege of a total independence of all other causes, but of which a very little reflection would have shown him the impossibility.

The will, as we have elsewhere said, is a modification of the brain, by which it is disposed to action, or prepared to give play to the organs. This will is necessarily determined by the qualities, good or bad, agreeable or painful, of the object or the motive that acts upon his sense, or of which the idea remains with him, and is

resuscitated by his memory. In consequence, he acts necessarily, his action is the result of the impulse he receives either from the motive, from the object, or from the idea which has modified his brain, or disposed his will. When he does not act according to this impulse, it is because there comes some new cause, some new motive, some new idea, which modified his brain in a different manner, gives him a new impulse, determines his will in another way, by which the action of the former impulse is suspended: thus, the sight of an agreeable object, or its idea, determines his will to set him in action to procure it; but if a new object or a new idea more powerfully attracts him, it gives a new direction to his will, annihilates the effect of the former, and prevents the action by which it was to be procured. This is the mode in which reflection, experience, reason, necessarily arrests or suspends the action of man's will: without this he would of necessity have followed the anterior impulse which carried him towards a then desirable object. In all this he always acts according to necessary laws from which he has no means of emancipating himself.

In short, the actions of man are never free; they are always the necessary consequence of his temperament, of the received ideas, and of the notions, either true or false, which he has formed to himself of happiness; of his opinions, strengthened by example, by education, and by daily experience. So many crimes are witnessed on the earth only because every thing conspires to render man vicious and criminal; the religion he has adopted, his government, his education, the examples set before him, irresistibly drive him on to evil: under these circumstances, morality preaches virtue to him in vain. In those societies where vice is esteemed, where crime is crowned, where venality is con-

stantly recompensed, where the most dreadful disorders are punished only in those who are too weak to enjoy the privilege of committing them with impunity, the practice of virtue is considered nothing more than a painful sacrifice of happiness. Such societies chastise, in the lower orders, those excesses which they respect in the higher ranks; and frequently have the injustice to condemn those in the penalty of death, whom public prejudices, maintained by constant example, have rendered criminal.

Man, then, is not a free agent in any one instant of his life: he is necessarily guided



in each step by those advantages, whether real or fictitious, that he attaches to the objects by which his passions are roused: these passions themselves are necessary in a being who unceasingly tends towards his own happiness; their energy is necessary, since that depends on his temperament; his temperament is necessary, because it depends on the physical elements which enter into his composition; the modification of this temperament is necessary, as it is the infallible and inevitable consequence of the impulse he receives from the incessant action of moral and physical beings.

## JOHN HOSPERS *Meaning and Free Will*

JOHN HOSPERS is a professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California and the author of a number of books on ethics. He ran several times for President of the United States on the Libertarian ticket. In the following he argues for a thoroughgoing determinism, not based on the model of physics but rather on psychoanalysis, which declares that all of our behavior is based on unconscious motivation.

PERHAPS the most obvious conception of freedom is this: an act is free if and only if it is a voluntary act. A response that occurs spontaneously, not as a result of your willing it, such as a reflex action, is not a free act. I do not know that this view is ever held in its pure form, but it is the basis for others. As it stands, of course, it is ambiguous: does "voluntary" entail "premeditated"? are acts we perform semi-automatically through habit to be called free acts? To what extent is a conscious decision to act required for the act to be classified as voluntary? What of sudden outbursts of feeling? They are hardly premeditated or decided upon, yet they may have their origin in the presence or absence of habit-patterns due to self-discipline which may have been consciously decided upon. Clearly the view needs to be refined. Now, however we may come to define "voluntary," it is perfectly possible to maintain that all voluntary acts are free acts and vice versa; after all, it is a matter of what meaning we are giving to the word