

free will. Some freedom or other in our choices and actions is a prerequisite of our being held morally responsible for them and getting moral credit for them. It is necessary, we occasionally hear, to our general standing as humans or as individuals. It is also a prerequisite for a good deal else, including our confidence in our enquiries and conclusions, and our large hopes for our futures. This freedom, whatever it is, is sometimes referred to as free will. But the latter term is also used for something more particular: the power of acting without the constraints of necessity or fate. The term is used as well, maybe in the same dictionary entry—see *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2001—for something else more particular: the ability to act at one's own discretion. There are two questions. What does this important freedom really amount to? Do we really have it?

To the first question, one answer given by philosophers is that this freedom is partly choosing and acting without the choices and actions being *determined*—without their being just effects of certain long causal sequences. This seems pretty close to the power of acting mentioned by the dictionary. Notice, however, that the absence of determinism—the concept that our actions are causally determined—or necessity is not necessarily an absence of constraints or compulsions as usually understood. A choice of mine might be quite other than just an effect of a certain causal sequence, other than determined, even if I made it because of a threat by the man with the gun.

The other main answer given by philosophers to the question of what the important freedom comes to is indeed that it is no more than not being constrained or compelled in the sense just noticed. That is, to have the freedom is to be able to act in accordance with your own desires and nature, rather than somehow against them because of something else. This may be what is intended by the second idea in the dictionary entry.

If dictionaries were really to help us be clear-headed about the whole subject, they might speak of the main question as a question of our *freedom*. They might use the term 'free will' just in connection with undetermined choices. It is relevant that, as used to be said and as still is conveyed by other terms, such choices are somehow owed to our wills, or indeed a faculty called 'the Will'. It could usefully be added that such choices can be spoken of as *originated*, since they come about without being certain effects and yet are definitely not understood as chance or

random events. Finally, it would be useful to speak of choices that do not go against our desires and natures as being *voluntary*.

The main questions, then, can be made more explicit. Is the important freedom we want origination or is it voluntariness? Have we actually got whichever it is?

It is difficult to proceed with the questions without noticing a crucial difference between origination and voluntariness—although noticing it may bring into operation a prejudice or two. Origination is inconsistent or incompatible with determinism as well understood. An originated choice, whatever else is to be said of it, is by definition somehow not determined. Voluntariness, on the other hand, is perfectly consistent with determinism. The point is well made by saying that for a choice to be voluntary is not for it to be causeless, but for it to have a certain kind of cause. It has, we can say, the cause that is the chooser's own desires or nature, not a cause going against them.

The tradition in philosophy known as incompatibilism (in which freedom is considered to be incompatible with determinism) has offered many persuasions, often called proofs, of the supposed fact that our conception of freedom, our conception of the great prerequisite, is of origination. We are told that what we think about and want, or certainly mainly think about and want, is origination. The tradition of compatibilism (in which freedom is considered to be compatible with determinism), as you will anticipate, has offered many persuasions of the other supposed fact. We are told that at least our fundamental thought and desire with respect to freedom is for no more than voluntariness. Incompatibilists, as defined, do not have to take a view on whether determinism is true. But, as you may also anticipate, almost all of them have denied or been inclined to deny determinism. They say we have actually got the freedom that matters because our choices in fact are not effects of certain causal sequences. Compatibilists, on the other hand, have either supported determinism or been agnostic about it.

Perhaps it is true that the main impetus to or ground for compatibilism has been a belief in determinism or an inclination to it. If you do believe in determinism, and also believe that the fact or reasonableness of responsibility and hope and so on in our lives presupposes *some* freedom—well then, the freedom must be voluntariness. The main impetus to incompatibilism, although this is not so clear, is perhaps that we or most of us want to hold others responsible for things, and have responsibility ourselves, in a way that requires origination and thus is inconsistent with determinism.

Partly on account of what may be the main impetus to compatibilism, it is a good idea to start on the whole problem with the matter of the formulation and truth of determinism. Formulating it, formulating a determinist

philosophy of mind, indeed getting clear about causation itself, is no easy matter. Such a philosophy of mind is easiest for those very few philosophers who believe that the mind is only the brain, that choices have only neural properties. But such materialism is in fact not the position even of most so-called physicalists or mind–brain identity theorists.

As for the truth of a formulated determinism, a persistent but irrelevant kind of resistance to it consists in pointing to events that are in fact or practice unpredictable—Brownian motion, electronic noise, or events in Chaos Theory. What would defeat determinism is unpredictability in theory or principle—as a result of events actually not being effects, there actually being no causal circumstances for them to be discovered by God or ultimate and complete science or anything else.

The main relevant resistance to determinism, now a lesser resistance than before, is the interpretation or group of interpretations of the mathematics that is quantum theory. The interpretation is that there are events down in the microworld that are not effects. Certainly such interpretations of quantum theory have been and still are influential.

Still, it is or should be notorious that, nearly a century after they were announced, there has been no direct and univocal evidence of the existence of chance events of the given kind. There is also the question of whether such microevents, if they exist, do issue in random macroevents—including events that are our choices or are bound up with them. There is also the possibility of arguing that random microevents would issue in random macroevents, and since there are none of the latter, there are none of the former. Plainly these materials can be argued to result in a certain dilemma. If any microevents would, so to speak, translate upwards into the brain and world we know, there are none, since there are no random macroevents. Or, if microevents would not or do not translate upwards, they do not matter to our subject at all.

Compatibilists, in addition to being moved by determinism, have provided a string of supposed proofs of their position. They have insisted, for example, that it is just clear to all who think about it that the freedom we think of and want is paradigmatically what is lacked by a man in jail. That freedom is evidently voluntariness. Further, the freedom that matters to us has been taken as our being able to *choose and do otherwise than we do*, and this is rightly analysed in a way consistent with determinism. Lately there has been much reliance on the contention that there are cases where we hold a person morally responsible for an action to which he or she had no alternative because of some background feature.

Incompatibilists have also made a direct appeal to clear truth—to what we are all said to know. We know, it is said, that someone who acts freely has more than one

possibility open to him or her. What that means, it is said, is that he or she is not caused to do one thing. We are said to be convinced of this, for example, when we are in the process of deciding what to do, whether that action is wagging a finger to the right or something more significant.

Latterly it has been argued again that a free action of mine is one that is *up to me*, and that something crucial follows from this. If determinism is true, my choice is the effect of long-past events of a causal sequence, events before my birth. My action can be up to me only if those past events are up to me, which they cannot be. Thus a free action, being one that is up to me, cannot possibly be something consistent with determinism.

Perhaps the philosophical debate is changing, however. Both compatibilists and incompatibilists agree and assume or assert that we have *one* important conception of freedom, one that at least stands above another. The whole debate depends on this. Is it true? To speak for myself, I am sure it is not, and can be as good as proved false. There is more agreement about this than there used to be.

Also, if you think about your past life from the inside, you can take it to have been determined, but also to feel something like a responsibility for it that has seemed to go with origination or free will. Can it be that the freedom that is important to you, or anyway whatever it is that is important to you, has a source in something wholly different from origination? Maybe something to do with the very nature of your consciousness, its subjective and constructive nature?

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The best anthology on free will is *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (2002), edited by Robert Kane. For incompatibilism, see in particular Peter van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (1983). Daniel Dennett's *Freedom Evolves* (2003) is a recent defence of compatibilism. For scepticism about both, there is Ted Honderich's *How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem* (2nd edn., 2002).