

Compatibilism vs. incompatibilism, continued

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1	Arguments for compatibilism	1
1.1	Arguments from the analysis of free will	1
1.2	The epistemic argument for compatibilism	1
1.3	The argument from randomness	2
1.4	Frankfurt's example and the principle of alternate possibilities	2
2	The consequence argument, again	4

1 Arguments for compatibilism

1.1 Arguments from the analysis of free will

Last time we discussed Frankfurt's theory of free will. This theory might be used as part of an argument for compatibilism, since the conditions that theory takes to be necessary and sufficient for free action can be realized in a deterministic world. The strength of this argument depends, of course, on one's confidence in the analysis.

1.2 The epistemic argument for compatibilism

Warfield discusses the following argument for compatibilism:

1. For all I know, determinism is true.
 2. I know that I have free will.
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- C. Determinism and free will are compatible.

What's wrong with this argument?

Here is a related argument:

1. I can't know whether or not the laws of nature are deterministic a priori.
 2. I can know a priori that I have free will.
 3. If I could know a priori that incompatibilism was true, I could know a priori that the laws are indeterministic. (2)
 4. I cannot know a priori that incompatibilism is true. (3)
 5. I cannot know a posteriori that incompatibilism is true. (3)
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- C. I cannot know that incompatibilism is true.

This is not an argument for compatibilism, but an argument that if incompatibilism is true, no one can know this. Is this argument convincing?

Is the incompatibilist committed to a view about how he would respond if given convincing evidence that the laws of nature are deterministic?

1.3 *The argument from randomness*

1.4 *Frankfurt's example and the principle of alternate possibilities*

One reason why you might find the consequence argument for incompatibilism convincing is that you might find something like the following principle plausible:

The principle of alternate possibilities (free will version)

A person's act is free if and only if that person could have done otherwise.

The natural thought is that if determinism is true, that means that no one ever could have done otherwise, since the laws of nature determine a unique future; and therefore that, given the principle of alternate possibilities, no one ever acts freely.

Frankfurt argues that this principle is false. If he is right, this does undercut one sort of incompatibilist intuition about free will. We will return to the question of whether and how an argument for the falsity of this principle is a problem for incompatibilism per se.

Frankfurt's argument against the above principle proceeds via an argument against the following closely related principle:

The principle of alternate possibilities (moral responsibility version)

A person is morally responsible for their action if and only if that person could have done otherwise.

Is it true that if the PAP's moral responsibility version is false, the free will version is as well? Why one might have some doubts about this, based on cases of moral responsibility without free will.

However, these sorts of worries are not ultimately of great importance, since the case that Frankfurt presents as an example of moral responsibility without alternate possibilities might rather be thought of directly as an example of free will.

Beginning on p. 835, Frankfurt develops the example of Jones₄, which is the most important of his attempted counterexamples to the principle of alternate possibilities:

“Suppose someone — Black, let us say — wants Jones₄ to perform a certain action. Black is prepared to go to considerable lengths to get his way, but he prefers to avoid showing his hand unnecessarily. So he waits until Jones₄ is about to make up his mind what to do, and does nothing unless it is clear to him (Black is an excellent judge of such things) that Jones₄ is going to decide to do something *other* than what he wants him to do. If it does become clear that Jones₄ is going to decide to do something else, Black takes effective steps to ensure that Jones₄ decides to do, and that he does do, what he wants him to do.

...

Now suppose that Black never has to show his hand because Jones₄, for reasons of his own, decides to perform and does perform the very action Black wants him to perform. In that case, it seems clear, Jones₄ will bear precisely the same moral responsibility for what he does as he would have borne if Black had not been ready to take steps to ensure that he do it. It would be quite unreasonable to excuse Jones₄ for his action ... on the basis of the fact that he could not have done otherwise. This fact played no role at all in leading him to act as he did. ... Indeed, everything happened just as it would have happened without Black's presence in the situation and without his readiness to intrude into it.”

Does this principle refute the principle of alternate possibilities (free will version)?

Let's suppose for the sake of argument that it does. Why should the incompatibilist care? We can consider three different possible answers to this question.

1. Perhaps we construct some argument from the falsity of the principle of alternate possibilities to the falsity of incompatibilism. But it is not easy to see how such an argument might go.
2. Perhaps, in the case of Black and Jones, we can simply stipulate that determinism is true. Why, one might ask, could this matter if Jones can't do otherwise anyway? But the incompatibilist should clearly not be convinced by this, and more than he should be convinced by the following argument: 'Imagine a free action, and just stipulate that determinism holds of the world in which the action is taking place; this is coherent, so compatibilism is true.'
3. Perhaps this sort of argument casts some doubt on the motivation for being an incompatibilist; for example, perhaps it shows that there is some problem with the consequence argument for incompatibilism.

To see why this might be so, consider the following new instance of the consequence argument, in which ‘BEGINNING’ is a name for the state of the universe, including the dispositions of Jones and Black, at t , before Jones begins to deliberate. Now consider some later time t^* , during which Jones is deliberating about whether to perform the action in question. It seems that we can argue as follows:

1. Jones at t^* is not free with respect to BEGINNING.
 2. Jones at t^* is not free with respect to L.
 3. Jones at t^* is not free with respect to (BEGINNING & L). (1,2)
 4. Necessarily, if (BEGINNING & L) then ACTION. (set up of the case)
 5. Jones at t^* is not free with respect to the fact that if (BEGINNING & L) then ACTION. (4)
 6. If we are not free with respect to (BEGINNING & L), and we are not free with respect to the fact that if (BEGINNING & L) then ACTION, we are not free with respect to ACTION. (instance of the No Choice Principle)
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- C. Jones at t^* is not free with respect to ACTION. (3,5,6)

If the incompatibilist grants that Jones’ action is free in Frankfurt’s example, he must say that the conclusion is false. Since the argument is valid, he must reject a premise. He cannot reject premise (6), since this is an instance of the No Choice Principle, which is crucial to the main argument for incompatibilism. So he must reject one of (1), (2), and (4). But which one?

Can the incompatibilist hold that Jones’ act is not free, even though he is morally responsible for the action?

2 The consequence argument, again

Let’s now return to the consequence argument for incompatibilism, and Warfield’s criticisms of that argument.

As before, let ‘STATE’ be a name for a complete description of the universe at some time in the actual past, and ‘L’ abbreviate a complete list of the actual laws of nature. ‘ACTION’ is the name of some arbitrary future action.

1. We are not free with respect to STATE. (A)
 2. We are not free with respect to L. (B)
 3. We are not free with respect to (STATE & L). (1,2)
 4. Necessarily, if (STATE & L) then ACTION. (Determinism)
 5. We are not free with respect to the fact that if (STATE & L) then ACTION. (4, C)
 6. If we are not free with respect to (STATE & L), and we are not free with respect to the fact that if (STATE & L) then ACTION, we are not free with respect to ACTION. (instance of the No Choice Principle)
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- C. We are not free with respect to ACTION. (3,5,6)

Let's distinguish the following two claims:

If the world is deterministic, then there are no free actions. (I.e.: If premise (4) is true, then (C) is true.)

Necessarily, if the world is deterministic, then there are no free actions.

Which of these claims expresses the incompatibilist thesis?

Let's grant that premises 1, 2, and 6 are true, and that the argument is valid. Which of the above claims, if either, follows?

What if the premises are not just true, but necessarily true?

Are the premises necessarily true?

Suppose that 1 and 6 are necessary, and that 2 is true but contingent, and that the argument is valid. Then consider this claim:

Necessarily, if the world is deterministic, then no creature which is not free with respect to the laws of nature performs any free actions.

Would this follow? Is this 'close enough' to incompatibilism?

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A closing challenge for the incompatibilist: try to explain what free will could be, such that indeterminism is a necessary condition for it to exist. Next we'll be turning to a few attempts to meet this challenge.