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9 Free Will

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It is sometimes said that Augustine discovered the faculty of the will and as a result inaugurated philosophy’s fascination with issues related to free will (Scanlon, 2005, p. 160).¹ While philosophers prior to Augustine clearly discussed related issues of, for example, voluntariness and agency, one finds in Augustine a focus on a faculty distinct from reason which is necessary for praise and blame that one would be hard-pressed to find in earlier thinkers. Augustine addressed the importance of free will in many of his works, including the *Confessions*, *City of God*, and of course *On Free Choice of the Will*. But he never seems to question whether or not humans have free will. That is, the following question is one that Augustine never seems to raise because he thought the answer was an obvious yes:

The Existence Question: Do humans have free will?²

In recent years, the existence question has come to be at the forefront of many of the debates concerning free will as an increasing number of scholars are skeptical about the existence of free will. My aim in this chapter is not so much to answer the existence question, but to provide a framework for understanding how the question should be answered. I also provide a taxonomical overview of aspects of the contemporary literature in order to show how one’s answer to the existence question depends on other issues pertaining to the nature of free will.

Do We have Free Will? Preliminaries to Approaching the Question

Before we can turn to addressing how we should address the existence question, much less answer it, we must first get clear on some terminological issues. The terminology surrounding the free will question is dicey because many of the terms get used in multiple ways. For instance, Peter van Inwagen, one of

the most influential figures in contemporary free will debates, argues that free will should be defined in terms of the ability to do otherwise. According to van Inwagen, free will involves,

hav[ing] both the following abilities: the ability to perform that act and the ability to refrain from performing that act. (This entails that we *have been* in the following position: for something we did do, we were at some point prior to our doing it able to refrain from doing it, able not to do it.)³ (van Inwagen, 2008)

Others, however, take the line that Augustine seems to take and define free will in terms of its being the control condition on moral responsibility; that is, they think that having free will just is controlling your actions in the way required for you to be properly held morally responsible for those actions (McKenna, 2008, p. 30; Timpe, 2008, p. 10; Vargas, 2007, p. 218). And while some take these two understandings of free will to be coextensive (Kane, 2002a, p. 17), there are others for whom the two can come apart (Fischer and Ravizza, 1998).⁴ For purposes of this chapter, I'm going to stipulate the following definition of free will:

Free will =_{df} the control condition on moral responsibility; that is, the capacity or set of capacities governing an agent's actions, the exercise of which are necessary for the agent to be morally responsible for those actions.

With this stipulation made, we are now in a position to define the two major families of views with respect to free will. The differentia between these two families of views is how they answer the following question, which has received a preponderance of attention in contemporary discussions:

The Compatibility Question: Is the existence of free will compatible with the truth of causal determinism?⁵

Compatibilists answer the compatibility question in the affirmative, holding that it is possible for agents to have free will even if causal determinism (hereafter, simply determinism) is true, while incompatibilists hold that the truth of determinism and the existence of free will are mutually exclusive. Neither answer to the compatibility question by itself takes a stand on either the existence question or the truth or falsity of causal determinism. While the majority of contemporary compatibilists think that free will does exist, there is at least one exception (Levy, 2009); furthermore, few compatibilists are committed to the truth of determinism. Similarly, incompatibilism per se takes no stand on either the truth of determinism or the proper answer to the existence question;

all that incompatibilism commits one to is the claim that it is not possible for the thesis of determinism to be true and for there to be free will. However, many incompatibilists answer the existence question in the affirmative, and thus think that the thesis of determinism is false; such incompatibilists are called libertarians. (We will return to species of incompatibilism which answer the existence question negatively below.)

Because libertarians and many compatibilists agree that there is such a thing as free will but disagree on at least one important feature of it (viz. its relationship to determinism), many authors use the terms "libertarian free will" and "compatibilist free will" to differentiate these two understandings of freedom. However, Peter van Inwagen argues that one ought not use the phrases "libertarian free will" and "compatibilist free will." For van Inwagen, these phrases are problematic because their use suggests that the debate between libertarians and compatibilists regarding free will is a debate about different purported existents, when really both libertarians and those compatibilists who believe in free will actually believe in the same existing thing, disagreeing instead over its relationship to the truth of determinism. Van Inwagen writes:

All compatibilists I know of believe in free will. Many incompatibilists (just exactly the libertarians: that's how "libertarian" is defined) believe in free will. And it's one and the same thing they believe in. Compatibilists say that the existence of this thing (whose conceptual identity is determined by the meaning of the English word "able," or of some more-or-less-equivalent word or phrase in some other language) is compatible with determinism; incompatibilists say that the existence of this thing is incompatible with determinism. If Alice used to be an incompatibilist and has been converted by some philosophical argument to compatibilism, she should describe her intellectual history this way: "I used to think that free will was incompatible with determinism. I was blind but now I see: Now I see that *it* is compatible with determinism." And her use of "it" does not have to be apologized for: this very thing she used to think was incompatible with determinism, she now thinks is compatible with determinism. (Compare: I used to think that knowledge was incompatible with the logical possibility of a Universal Deceiver. Now I see that *it* is compatible with the logical possibility of such a being.) What Alice should *not* say is this:

I used to think that free will was one thing, a thing incompatible with determinism. Now I think it's another thing, a thing compatible with determinism. The thing I used, incorrectly, to call "free will" is incompatible with determinism; I was right to think it was incompatible with determinism. But it doesn't exist (I mean no agent has it), and it couldn't exist, and if it did exist, it wouldn't be right to call it "free will."

Talk of “libertarian free will” is therefore at best useless. . . . [L]ibertarians who become compatibilists shouldn’t say, “I see now that there is no such thing as what I called ‘free will.’” They should say, “I see now that free will doesn’t have some of the properties I thought it had; for one thing, it isn’t incompatible with determinism.” (van Inwagen, 2008)

While van Inwagen is correct that both incompatibilists and those compatibilists who believe in free will believe in the same existant,⁶ there is still reason to think the phrases that van Inwagen finds “at best useless” have an acceptable usage. Responding to this terminological restriction by van Inwagen, Lynne Rudder Baker argues that there is a legitimate use of the phrase “libertarian free will” and, by the same set of reasons, “compatibilist free will”:

“Libertarian free will” is shorthand for “a libertarian conception of free will,” just as “Newtonian simultaneity” is shorthand for “a Newtonian conception of simultaneity.” Peter van Inwagen has complained vehemently about my use of a term like “libertarian free will”; so, I am stipulating what “libertarian free will” is to denote. Since “free will” is a term of philosophical art, it does not (*pace* van Inwagen) have an unambiguous pre-theoretical meaning. “Libertarian free will” and “compatibilist free will” are as innocent as “Newtonian simultaneity” and “Einsteinian simultaneity.” All these terms are clear and unambiguous. (Baker, 2009, p. 173, note 44)

In what follows, I will follow Baker in thinking there is an acceptable use of the terms “libertarian free will” and “compatibilist free will,” despite agreeing with van Inwagen that both sides of this debate are agreeing on the existence of a single thing.

General Positions with Respect to the Nature of Free Will

In addition to the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists regarding the compatibility question, there are other crucial questions regarding the nature of free will. Setting aside the compatibility question, how should we understand this thing called “free will”? Answering this question is difficult, at least in part because there are “many varieties of free will,” only some of which are “worth wanting” (Dennett, 1984, pp. 72 and 153–72). As Manuel Vargas notes,

As numerous incompatibilists have long acknowledged, there are plenty of senses of freedom, and perhaps of responsibility, that are compatible with determinism. What is at stake, at least in the mainstream of philosophical

work on free will, is the kind of freedom that is the distinctive mark of responsible agency and attendant judgments of deservingness of moralized praise and blame.⁷ (Vargas, 2009, p. 49)

As indicated earlier, I’m going to stipulate that “free will” and “freedom” refer to the kind of freedom or control over one’s actions that is required for moral responsibility.⁸ While this isn’t the only (or perhaps even the most important) kind of freedom, this is the freedom that is central to the majority of the contemporary philosophical debates about free will.

But even with this restriction about the kind of free will made, there is still a further important issue regarding the nature of free will that needs to be addressed. As I’ve argued elsewhere (Timpe, 2008, ch. 1), the contemporary free will literature contains two dominant general conceptions of the nature of free will. According to the first of these, which has received the majority of the attention in the literature, free will is primarily a function of being able to do otherwise than one in fact does. For example, I have free will with respect to drinking too much espresso if I could have exercised temperance and stopped after three shots. According to the second approach, free will is primarily a function of an agent being the source of her actions. On this approach, I drink the espresso of my own free will if nothing outside of me is causally sufficient for my action or choice. Both of these notions can be seen in the following passage taken from Robert Kane:

We believe we have free will when we view ourselves as agents capable of influencing the world in various ways. Open alternatives, or alternative possibilities, seem to lie before us. We reason and deliberate among them and choose. We feel (1) it is “up to us” what we choose and how we act; and this means we could have chosen or acted otherwise. As Aristotle noted: when acting is “up to us,” so is not acting. This “up-to-us-ness” also suggests (2) the ultimate control of our actions lies in us and not outside us in factors beyond our control.⁹ (Kane, 2005, p. 6)

The vast majority of the contemporary free will literature focuses on the first of these two approaches, so much so that John Martin Fischer (1999, p. 99) refers to it as the traditional view: “Traditionally the most influential view about the sort of freedom necessary and sufficient for moral responsibility posits that this sort of freedom involves the availability of genuinely open alternative possibilities at certain key points in one’s life.” In contrast, a smaller, but growing, percentage of the extant literature focuses primarily on the issues of “sourcehood” and “origination” that are at the heart of the second approach to free will. I will call the first of these conceptions—the conception that free will is primarily a matter of having alternative possibilities—the “alternative

possibilities conception." Similarly, I will call the second of these conceptions—that free will is primarily a matter of our being the source of our choices in a way that cannot be traced to sufficient causal antecedents outside of us—the "sourcehood conception."

The distinction between the alternative possibilities conception and the sourcehood conception, on the one hand, and the debate between compatibilists and incompatibilists over the correct answer to the compatibility question, on the other hand, are orthogonal to each other. There are compatibilists and incompatibilists who embrace the alternative possibilities conception,¹⁰ just as there are compatibilists and incompatibilists who prefer the sourcehood conception.¹¹ Therefore, how one attempts to address the existence question will depend not only on one's answer to the compatibility question, but also on which of these two conceptions of the nature of free will one endorses. Rather than settle these issues here, in what follows I will simply assume that one is able to give an account of what free will is that specifies these issues as one prefers.

Positive Answers to the Existence Question

Let us turn now to ways in which one could attempt to answer the existence question. I first consider ways in which one could attempt to justify a positive answer to the existence question; I will then show ways one could approach giving a negative answer to the same question. There are at least two general ways one could attempt to argue for the existence of free will, which I will call "indirect" and "direct."

Indirect proofs

I begin with indirect proofs for the existence of free will. These proofs proceed by showing that free will is a necessary condition on something else that is itself actual; they are indirect in the sense that they go "through" this other existent. Peter van Inwagen provides one such argument as follows:

There are, moreover, seemingly unanswerable arguments that, if they are correct, demonstrate that the existence of moral responsibility entails the existence of free will, and, therefore, if free will does not exist, moral responsibility does not exist either. It is, however, evident that moral responsibility does exist: if there were no such thing as moral responsibility nothing would be anyone's fault, and it is evident that there are states of affairs to which one can point and say, correctly, to certain people: That's *your* fault.¹² (van Inwagen, 2008, p. 328)

Other indirect proofs could be offered that free will is necessary for basic desert, justified deliberation, agency, rationality, the autonomy and dignity of persons, creativity, cooperation, self-expression, artistic creativity, or the value of friendship and love.¹³ Whatever form an indirect proof takes, two steps will be needed for such a proof to be successful:

- (i) the proof will have to succeed in showing that free will is necessary for this further object, *x*; and
- (ii) it will have to be the case that the actuality of *x* is evident or established by a further argument.

So by their very nature, indirect proofs for the existence of free will involve two steps, both of which will be open to dispute. Consider van Inwagen's indirect proof based around moral responsibility described earlier. For him, it is "evident" that there is moral responsibility; but a number of philosophers—moral responsibility skeptics, a few of which we'll consider below—deny the existence of free will, thereby taking issue with step (ii) of van Inwagen's indirect proof. Or consider, for example, an indirect proof based on justified deliberation. According to van Inwagen, deliberating about performing a particular activity presupposes that one believes that it is possible to perform it:

If someone deliberates about whether to do A or to do B, it follows that his behavior manifests a belief that it is *possible* for him to do A—that he *can* do A, that he has it within his power to do A—and a belief that it is possible for him to do B. Someone's trying to decide which of two books to buy manifests a belief with respect to each of these books that it is possible for him to buy *it* just as surely as would his holding it aloft and crying, "I can buy this book."¹⁴ (van Inwagen, 1983, p. 155)

Van Inwagen considers Baron Holbach, who denied the existence of free will. Van Inwagen thinks it obvious that Holbach deliberated. ("Does he deliberate? Well, of course he did" [van Inwagen, 1983, p. 157].) Van Inwagen concludes not only that free will exists, but that either Holbach really believed in it as well or had inconsistent beliefs:

There is at least some reason to suspect that he [Holbach] did not believe that *he* lacked free will. I have given arguments above for the conclusion that no one could deliberate about whether to perform an act that he does not believe it is possible for him to perform. Even if these arguments are wrong, their *conclusion* has been accepted by everyone I know of who has thought about deliberation.¹⁵ (van Inwagen, 1983, p. 156)

And lest the reader think that only van Inwagen (or libertarians in general) give indirect arguments of this sort, similar arguments are advanced by a number of leading compatibilists.¹⁶

Given their structure, there are two ways to resist indirect arguments for the existence of free will, each taking aim at one of the steps in the general form that indirect arguments take above. One could, for instance, deny the existence of the “further thing” that the indirect argument claims requires free will. This is exactly what Saul Smilansky does, for example, with respect to van Inwagen’s indirect argument based on moral responsibility:

Van Inwagen seems to think that the reality of libertarian moral responsibility *can* be proved in a way that he himself admits fails in the case of libertarian free will: the existence of libertarian moral responsibility is, in some unclarified way, immediately obvious, while this is not so with libertarian free will. As he puts it, “surely we cannot doubt the reality of moral responsibility?” (p. 206). . . . We all just know, it is claimed, that we are sometimes morally responsible in the libertarian sense. This of course would seem to contradict what many philosophers have claimed. . . . The existence of libertarian moral responsibility is far from being obvious: many people have doubted this and still doubt it. Since libertarian moral responsibility depends on the at best problematic notion of libertarian free will, it is highly implausible to see the existence of libertarian moral responsibility as obvious; and this is even more implausible if the existence of libertarian moral responsibility is thought to be obvious independently of the case for libertarian free will. (Smilansky, 1982, pp. 30 and 32)

As Smilansky here shows, in order for an indirect argument for the existence of free will to be successful, it must proceed via something which both requires free will and which itself has been successfully established to exist.

A second way to resist indirect arguments for an affirmative answer to the existence question would be to attack the other step in the general schema of indirect arguments. On this tack, one calls into question free will’s purported necessity for the further thing which is taken to exist. Derk Pereboom, for instance, argues that van Inwagen’s indirect argument on the basis of rational deliberation fails insofar as it is false that one must believe (and thus false that one must *truly* believe) that one has the metaphysical ability to pursue either of two courses of action (which is what van Inwagen thinks free will is) in order to rationally deliberate (Pereboom, 2008a).

It should be noted that there are no proofs for a negative answer to the existence question that are clearly indirect.¹⁷ Even if one showed (i) that free will was necessary for some further thing and (ii) that the further thing did not exist, that would be insufficient to prove that there was no free will. For

while on this approach the existence of free will is necessary for the existence of the further thing, the existence of the further thing is not necessary for the existence of free will.

Direct proofs

I turn then to direct proofs. First, I’ll consider how direct proofs for an affirmative answer to the existence question go, and then discuss direct proofs for the denial of free will. Unlike indirect proofs, direct proofs don’t try to establish that free will exists by showing how it is a necessary condition for some further thing (like moral responsibility or rational deliberation). Direct proofs work as follows. First, one specifies an account of what exactly free will is (e.g., free will is *xyz*) and then one attempts to show that that thing exists (e.g., “Hey look, there’s *xyz* in the world”).¹⁸ One can take the direct approach to show the existence of compatibilist free will, or to show the existence of libertarian free will. (As we’ll see later, one can also take a direct approach to show that free will does not exist.)

Consider first a direct proof for the existence of compatibilist free will. John Martin Fischer’s particular version of compatibilism is the most influential compatibilist view in the contemporary free will and moral responsibility literature.¹⁹ Even William Rowe, an incompatibilist, refers to Fischer’s view as “the most plausible compatibilist account of freedom” (Rowe, 2006, p. 298).²⁰ According to Fischer’s specific brand of compatibilism, which he calls “semicompatibilism,” the truth of causal determinism is *compatible* with moral responsibility even if causal determinism ends up being *incompatible* with a certain kind of freedom. Fischer differentiates between two kinds of control (or what he sometimes calls two kinds of free will): guidance control and regulative control. Regulative control involves having control over which of a number of genuinely open possibilities becomes actual. And while semicompatibilism is officially agnostic about whether regulative control is compatible with the truth of causal determinism, Fischer himself finds it “highly plausible” that regulative control is incompatible with causal determinism (Fischer, 2007, p. 56).²¹ But, for reasons I do not have time to explore here,²² Fischer thinks that regulative control is not required for moral responsibility. The freedom-relevant condition necessary for moral responsibility (what I earlier gave as the working definition of free will for this chapter) is guidance control, and such control is compatible with determinism. Fischer’s discussion of guidance control is extensive. Here, let me simply give a brief overview that is hopefully sufficient for the task at hand. According to Fischer, “guidance control of one’s behaviors has two components: the behavior must issue from one’s own mechanism, and this mechanism must be appropriately responsive to reasons” (Fischer, 2002, p. 307). The responsiveness that

Fischer takes to be required here, which he calls moderate reasons-responsiveness, requires that the agent “act on a mechanism that is regularly receptive to reasons, some of which are moral reasons” (Fischer and Ravizza, 1998, p. 82). This means that the volitional structure that results in the agent’s choices manifests an understandable pattern of recognizing moral reasons for choosing in various ways. Such an agent “recognizes how reasons fit together, sees why one reason is stronger than another, and understands how the acceptance of one reason as sufficient implies that a stronger reason must also be sufficient” (Fischer and Ravizza, 1998, p. 71). Furthermore, the agent’s volitional structure must also be reactive to those reasons in the right kind of way:

In the case of reactivity to reasons, the agent (when acting from the relevant mechanism) must simply display *some* reactivity, in order to render it plausible that his mechanism has the “executive power” to react to the actual incentive to do otherwise. (Fischer and Ravizza, 1998, p. 75)

The second requirement for guidance control is that the agent takes responsibility for the reasons-responsive mechanism that results in her choices; that is, that the mechanism is *her own*, or one for which she has taken responsibility. This feature of Fischer’s view marks an important difference from purely structural or hierarchical compatibilist accounts (such as Harry Frankfurt’s). For Fischer, “the *mere existence* of [the right kind of volitional] mesh is *not* sufficient for moral responsibility; the *history* behind the mesh is also relevant” (Fischer and Ravizza, 1998, p. 196). So in order for an agent to be morally responsible, he needs to have taken responsibility for his volitional structure. This involves three related elements:

First, the agent must see that his choices have certain effects in the world—that is, he must see himself as the source of consequences in the world (in certain circumstances). Second, the individual must see that he is a fair target for the reactive attitudes as a result of how he affects the world. Third, the views specified in the first two conditions—that the individual can affect the external world in certain characteristic ways through his choices, and that he can be fairly praised and/or blamed for so exercising his agency—must be based on his evidence in an appropriate way. (Fischer, 2006, p. 224)

Putting these various elements together, we can summarize Fischer’s view as follows:

Fischer’s Condition: a person chooses freely only if he chooses as he does (i) because of an appropriately reasons-responsive mechanism and (ii) because that individual has taken responsibility for his mechanism in an appropriate way.

We might think of these two aspects as respectively insisting on the agent having the right kind of mesh and the right history behind that mesh. (Taken together, these two aspects clearly mark this view as a sourcehood approach—or as Fischer often puts it, an “actual-sequence” approach to free will and moral responsibility [Fischer, 2006, p. 224]—rather than an alternative possibilities approach.)

While Fischer is never explicit about the following, it’s pretty clear from his discussions of guidance control that he thinks that at least some individuals at some times meet the requirements laid out in Fischer’s Condition.²³ At least some rational agents have moderately reasons-responsive mechanisms such that they are capable of appropriately responding to moral reasons. Furthermore, some of these agents are such that they have taken responsibility for their moderately reasons-responsive mechanisms. Thus, given the nature of free will as construed by Fischer, there are at least some agents who have free will, and the existence question is answered in the affirmative.

Robert Kane is the libertarian who has done the most to prove via a direct route the existence of free will. Kane writes of the “two pronged modern attack on free will”:

The first prong of the modern attack on libertarian free will comes from *compatibilists*, who argue that, despite appearances to the contrary, determinism does not really conflict with free will at all. . . . The second prong of the modern attack on libertarian free will goes a step further, . . . arguing that libertarian free will itself is *impossible* or *unintelligible* and has no place in the modern scientific picture of the world. Such an ultimate freedom is not something we could have anyway, says its critics. (Kane, 2007, pp. 8–9)

In response to the first prong, Kane endorses a number of arguments which aim to show that free will is incompatible with the truth of causal determinism. Kane endorses a version of van Inwagen’s influential Consequence Argument (Kane, 2007, pp. 10–13),²⁴ but as we’ll see later his account of what free will is entails another argument for incompatibilism.

For present purposes, I’ll focus on Kane’s response to the second prong of the attack, insofar as it is more related to Kane’s attempt to prove the existence of free will. Kane writes:

I think libertarians must accept the empirical challenge of determinism (that it might turn out to be true), if libertarians are going to be serious about finding a place for free will in *the natural order* where we exist and exercise our freedom. This is the “Existence Question” for free will, and . . . it cannot be finally settled by armchair speculation, but only by future empirical inquiry. (Kane, 1996, p. 184)

Kane wants to avoid appeal to “extra factor strategies” such as immaterial souls, noumenal selves, agent-causation, and so on, if at all possible. He thinks it is possible to avoid extra factors because the conditions required for free will are (i) indeterminism, (ii) alternative possibilities (or “the ability to do otherwise”), and (iii) ultimate responsibility. Since Kane is an incompatibilist, it is easy to see why he thinks free will requires indeterminism. Furthermore, not all indeterminism is relevant for free will; the indeterminism must be related to what the agent is able to do. Shortly, we’ll see later that the need for alternative possibilities is also entailed by the third condition, which Kane thinks is more fundamental for the existence of free will. The basic idea behind ultimate responsibility is as follows:

to be *ultimately responsible* for an action, an agent must be responsible for anything that is a sufficient reason, cause, or motive for the action’s occurring. . . . [This] tells us that free will is only possible if *some* voluntary choices or actions in our life histories did *not* have sufficient causes or motives that would have required us to have formed them by still earlier choices. (Kane, 2005, pp. 121–2).²⁵

Kane doesn’t think that every free and voluntary choice needs to lack sufficient causes or motives; he allows for the fact that some of an agent’s actions can be necessitated by her character—that is, by her will, motives, purposes, and so on. In these cases, the necessitated action will be free only if the agent freely formed her character which necessitated the later action:

If agents are to be ultimately responsible for their own wills, then if their wills are already set one way when they act, *they* must be responsible for their wills having been set that way—not God . . . or fate or society or behavioral engineers or nature or upbringing. And this means that some of their past voluntary choices or actions must have played an indispensable role in the formation of their present purposes and motives.²⁶ (Kane, 2002b, p. 412)

On these will-setting occasions, the agent will satisfy what Kane calls the plurality condition, for on these occasions the agent is choosing between two competing options that are each such that she could have done them voluntarily, intentionally, and rationally (Kane, 2002b, p. 411). (This is why ultimate responsibility entails alternative possibilities, at least at some point in the causal history of an agent’s actions.) Kane’s classic example of a will-setting occasion is the story of a business woman, Anne:²⁷

Consider a business-woman who faces a conflict of this kind [as described in will-setting actions]. She is on the way to a meeting important to her career

when she observes an assault taking place in an alley. An inner struggle ensues between her moral conscience, to stop and call for help, and her career ambitions that tell her she cannot miss the meeting. She has to make an effort of will to overcome the temptation to go on to her meeting. If she overcomes this temptation, it will be the result of her effort, but if she fails, it will be because she did not *allow* her effort to succeed. And this is due to the fact that, while she wanted to overcome temptation, she also wanted to fail, for quite different reasons.²⁸ (Kane, 2002b, p. 417)

When properly elaborated, Kane contends that this case shows the various conditions that must be met in order for an agent, such as Anne, to have free will.

So far, this establishes what Kane thinks is *required* for free will. But it does not establish that we *have* free will. In order to do the latter step, Kane appeals to recent work in the philosophy of mind which can help explain how human agents can have free will:

Imagine in cases of conflict characteristic of self-forming actions . . . like the businesswoman’s, that the indeterministic noise which is providing an obstacle to her overcoming temptation is not coming from an external source, but has its source in her own will, since she also deeply desires to do the opposite. To understand how this could be, imagine that two crossing recurrent neural networks are involved in the brain, each influencing the other, and representing her conflicting motivations. . . . The input of one of these neural networks consists in the woman’s reasons for acting morally and stopping to help the victim; the input of the other network comprises her ambitious motives for going on to her meeting.

The two networks are connected so that the indeterminism that is an obstacle to her making one of the choices is present because of her simultaneous conflicting desire to make the other choice—the indeterminism thus arising from a tension-creating conflict in the will, as we said. This conflict . . . would be reflected in appropriate regions of the brain by movement away from thermodynamic equilibrium. The result would be a stirring up of chaos in the neural networks involved. (Kane, 2007, p. 28)

According to Kane, whichever of these two networks wins out, it will be the case that the agent has willed the outcome in the sense required for free will. Kane then cites the work of neurobiologists Gordon Globus, Francis Crick, and Christof Koch, and philosopher of mind Owen Flanagan as providing some empirical support for this account of competing neural networks (Kane, 1996, pp. 39 and 130). While Kane doesn’t think that this empirical support is conclusive, he does think that it gives “tentative” support to the existence of libertarian free will (Kane, 1996, p. 197).

Negative Answers to the Existence Question

As stated earlier, there are no clearly indirect arguments for the nonexistence of free will, for arguing that free will is necessary for some further thing *x*, but then showing that *x* isn't actual would not establish that free will does not exist. If one could instead argue that free will were sufficient for some further thing *x* and then show that *x* wasn't actual, that would entail that free will doesn't exist; but there are no such arguments in the literature. So, the attempts to answer the existence question in the negative that I will examine here will be direct attempts. But here there are two different ways one could develop a direct denial for the existence of free will, which I shall refer to as contingent denials and categorical denials. A contingent denial will be a view which holds that while it is possible that free will exists, it is a contingent fact that free will does not exist. Categorical denials will be stronger: free will does not exist because it is impossible for it to exist.²⁹

Contingent denials

Derk Pereboom's "hard incompatibilism" is an example of contingent denial. Pereboom's case for hard incompatibilism has a number of steps. First, he argues against compatibilist accounts of free will. He offers a manipulation-based argument against compatibilism, which aims to show that,

an action's being produced by a deterministic process that traces back to factors beyond the agent's control, even when she satisfies all the conditions on moral responsibility specified by the prominent compatibilist theories, presents in principle no less of a threat to moral responsibility than does deterministic manipulation. (Pereboom, 2008b, p. 93)³⁰

The second step in Pereboom's argument is to argue that any satisfactory incompatibilist view which affirms the existence of free will must be of a certain sort. One way of classifying varieties of incompatibilism is in terms of what kind of indeterminism is required for free will. Some forms of incompatibilism hold that the indeterminism is (or needs to be) found in ordinary causation between events, while others postulate an additional kind of causation—agent-causation—to account for the indeterminism.³¹ According to agent-causal views, the indeterminism involved in event-causation provides the opportunity for free will, but doesn't by itself provide for the kind of control needed. As Pereboom says in an early paper,

According to one libertarian view, what makes actions free is just their being constituted (partially) of indeterministic natural events. . . . But natural

indeterminacies of these types cannot, by themselves, account for freedom of the sort required for moral responsibility. As has often been pointed out, such random physical events are no more within our control than are causally determined physical events, and thus, we can no more be morally responsible for them than, in the indeterminist opinion, we can be for events that are causally determined. (Pereboom, 1997, p. 253)

Insofar as he thinks that event-causal libertarian views are unable to secure any more control than are compatibilist accounts, if there is to be libertarian free will, we would have to be agent-causes. However, Pereboom thinks it unlikely that we are agent-causes.

Although our being undetermined agent causes has not been ruled out as a coherent possibility, it is not credible given our best physical theories. Thus we need to take seriously the prospect that we are not free in the sense required for moral responsibility. (Pereboom, 2008c)

Why think that we are not agent-causes, given our best physical theories?

If agent-causes are to be capable of such free decisions, they would require the power to produce deviations from the physical laws—deviations from what these laws would predict and from what we would expect given these laws. But such agent-causes would be embodied in a world that, by the evidence that supports our current theories in physics, is nevertheless wholly governed by the laws of physics. (Pereboom, 2001, p. 79)

Therefore, according to Pereboom's hard incompatibilism, unless future investigation warrants a substantive rethinking of our view of the world in which we live, we ought to conclude that we lack the kind of free will required for moral responsibility. Given that we *could* have such freedom if the world were different (i.e., if we were agent-causes), his view is only a contingent denial of free will.

Categorical denials

In contrast, Saul Smilansky and Galen Strawson both advocate categorical denial. Unlike a number of individuals who deny the existence of libertarian free will, Smilansky sees the attraction it presents:

The various things that free will could make possible, if it did exist, such as deep sense of desert, worth, and justification *are* worth wanting. They

remain worth wanting even if something that would be necessary in order to have them is not worth wanting because it cannot be coherently conceived. It is just this, the impossibility of the conditions for things that are so deeply worth wanting, which makes the realization of the absence of free will so significant. (Smilansky, 2002, p. 504, note 3)

But the existence of free will is impossible because “the conditions required by an ethically satisfying sense of libertarian free will, which would give us anything beyond sophisticated formulations of compatibilism, are self-contradictory and hence cannot be met” (Smilansky, 2002, pp. 490–1).³² In rejecting the possibility of free will at this step, Smilansky draws on the influential work of Galen Strawson. Strawson is probably the most influential categorical denier of the existence of free will. Strawson’s categorical denial is the conclusion of his Basic Argument, which comes in a variety of expressions. Here are two of them:

- (1) Nothing can be *causa sui*—nothing can be the cause of itself.
- (2) In order to be truly morally responsible for one’s actions, one would have to be *causa sui*, at least in certain crucial mental aspects.
- (3) Therefore nothing can be truly morally responsible. (Strawson, 1994, p. 5)

A more elaborate version of the Basic Argument is as follows:

- (1) It is undeniable that one is the way one is, initially, as a result of heredity and early experience, and it is undeniable that these are things for which one cannot be in any [way] responsible (morally or otherwise).
- (2) One cannot at any later state of life hope to accede to true moral responsibility for the way one is by trying to change the way one already is as a result of heredity and previous experience.
- (3) Both the particular way in which one is moved to try to change oneself, and the degree of one’s success in one’s attempt to change, will be determined by how one already is as a result of heredity and previous experience.
- (4) Any further changes that one can bring about only after one has brought about certain initial changes will in turn be determined, via the initial changes, by heredity and previous experience.
- (5) This may not be the whole story, for it may be that some changes in the way one is are traceable not to heredity and experience but to the influence of indeterministic or random factors. But it is absurd to suppose that indeterministic or random factors, for which one is *ex hypothesi* in no way responsible, can in themselves contribute in any way to one’s being truly morally responsible for how one is. (Strawson, 1994, p. 7)

Although both versions of the Basic Argument given here are expressed in terms of moral responsibility, it should be clear from the context that at issue

here is the kind of control required for moral responsibility—that is, free will as defined earlier.³³ And if it is true, as Strawson claims, that such free will requires control over things that it is impossible for us to control, then it will be the case that free will is not only nonexistent, but necessarily so. The existence of free will is categorically denied.

Conclusion

While contemporary free will debates have focused on a number of issues—is free will compatible with determinism? Is free will compatible with indeterminism? Does free will require agent-causal powers?—a central question in recent years has been the existence question—do humans have free will? Above, I’ve canvassed the major ways that philosophers have set out to answer the existence question, both in the affirmative and in the negative. And while I haven’t tried to provide an answer to the existence question, the complexities of the issues involved in doing so should now be clear. In particular, I’ve shown how one’s approach to providing an answer to the existence question depends on how one thinks about other issues pertaining to the nature of free will. It remains for future work to continue to refine these various positions and arguments, with the aim of getting us closer to the truth of the matter.³⁴

Notes

- 1 A more cautious claim is made by Copleston (1993, vol. II, p. 82).
- 2 This question is not the same as the more general existence question “does free will exist?” for it is possible there exist agents which have free will but are not human. While little if anything that I say in what follows hangs on whether or not humans in particular have free will, I will continue to frame the Existence Question in terms of humans both for ease of explication and because most metaphysicians working on free will think that humans are as good a candidate for having free will as any other.
- 3 Actually, it is not quite correct to say this is how van Inwagen defines free will. What van Inwagen defines is not free will but the “free will thesis.” Van Inwagen advises that one “define sentences, not terms” (van Inwagen, 2008). In what follows, I danger not to take van Inwagen’s advice. For more on this definition of free will, see van Inwagen (1975, p. 188) and Clarke (2003, p. 3).
- 4 The relationship between these two definitions of free will is all the more confusing because van Inwagen also says that free will, on his preferred definition, is required for moral responsibility: “Without free will there is no moral responsibility: if moral responsibility exists, then someone is morally responsible for something he has done or for something he has left undone. . . . Therefore, if moral responsibility exists, someone has free will. Therefore, if no one has free will, moral responsibility doesn’t exist” (van Inwagen, 1983, p. 162). For van Inwagen, this is because moral responsibility requires the ability to do otherwise, which for him, as seen above, just is free will.
- 5 Causal determinism is the thesis that a proposition, call it *P*, which completely describes the way that the entire world was at some point in the distant past.

excluding all the temporally relational facts about the world, together with a proposition, call it L , which expresses the conjunction of all the laws of nature, entails a further proposition describing a unique future. That is, given P and L , there is only one possible way for the future to be. See Timpe (2008, pp. 12–14) and van Inwagen (1983, ch. III).

- 6 As Matt Talbert rightly points out in a personal correspondence, while incompatibilists and those compatibilists who believe in free will are referring to whatever capacity or set of capacities satisfies the control condition on moral responsibility, they disagree about the nature of this existent, and likely also the role that it plays.
- 7 Vargas (2010) comments as follows:

I've been told that in the good old days of the 1970s, when Quine's desert landscapes were regarded as ideal real estate and David Lewis and John Rawls had not yet left a legion of influential students rewriting the terrain of metaphysics and ethics respectively, compatibilism was still compatibilism about free will. And, of course, incompatibilism was still incompatibilism about free will. That is, compatibilism was the view that free will was compatible with determinism. Incompatibilism was the view that free will was incompatible with determinism. What philosophers argued about was whether free will was compatible with determinism. Mostly, this was an argument about how to understand claims that one could do otherwise. You needn't have bothered to talk about moral responsibility, because it was just obvious that you couldn't have moral responsibility without free will. The literature was a temple of clarity. Then, somehow, things began to go horribly wrong. To be sure, there had been some activity in the 1960s that would have struck some observers as ominous. Still, it was not until the 1980s that those first warning signs gave way to the first boulders careening towards the pillars of the temple. It was then that the meanings of terms twisted. Hybrid positions appeared. By the late 1980s a landslide had begun, giving way to a veritable avalanche of work in the mid-1990s that continues up to now. Now, self-described compatibilists and incompatibilists make frequent concessions to each other, concessions that made little sense in the framework of the older literature. New positions and strange terminology appear in every journal publication. The temple of clarity is no more.
- 8 In response to the question "What is at the heart of the traditional concept to free will?," Daniel Dennett responds as follows: "Here's a suggestion: *Free will is whatever it is that gives us moral responsibility*" (Dennett, 2008, p. 254). While Dennett is right to relate free will with moral responsibility, the former is not sufficient for the latter, as there are other necessary conditions on moral responsibility; see Timpe (2008, pp. 9–10).
- 9 See also Kane (2002a, p. 10) for a similar discussion.
- 10 Alternative possibilities compatibilists include David Lewis, Kadri Vihvelin, and Joseph Campbell. The most notable alternative possibilities incompatibilist is Peter van Inwagen. For a further discussion of these positions, see Timpe (2008), particularly chapters 1 and 2.
- 11 Sourcehood compatibilists include Harry Frankfurt and John Martin Fischer; sourcehood incompatibilists include Robert Kane, Eleonore Stump, Derk Pereboom, and Kevin Timpe. For further discussion, see Timpe (2008), particularly chapters 5, 6, and 7. Furthermore, it might be that one is agnostic between the alternative possibilities and sourcehood conceptions of free will; Al Mele and Manuel Vargas are two such examples.
- 12 Later in the same essay, van Inwagen says the following about moral responsibility: "Since 'moral responsibility' figures prominently in my statement of the free-will

problem, one might expect that at this point I should define this term, or at least define some sentence or sentences in which it occurs—"x is morally responsible for y," perhaps. I won't do this. If I *did* offer a definition in this general area, it would be something like this:

x is morally responsible for the fact that $p =_d$ It is x's fault that p.

But so much confusion attends the phrase "moral responsibility" (the confusion is of our own making; as Berkeley said, "... we have first raised a dust, and then complain we cannot see") that I despair of straightening it all out in a paper that is not devoted to that topic alone."

- 13 See, among others: Kane (1996), Ekstrom (1998), Fischer (2006, pp. 21–4 and ch. 5), and Dennett (1984, ch. 7).
- 14 Van Inwagen's argument takes as its starting point Richard Taylor's position (Taylor, 1963, ch. 5), but differs from Taylor's in a number of important ways. For related discussions, see Coffman and Warfield (2005), Nelkin (2004a, 2004b), and Pereboom (2008).
- 15 Van Inwagen goes on in the same passage to say that the conclusion that deliberation requires free will is "as near to being uncontroversial as any philosophically interesting proposition can be." As we'll see in a minute, this conclusion is the subject of considerable controversy; whether this tells against van Inwagen's account or against the state of philosophically interesting propositions, I'll leave for the reader to decide.
- 16 An example here would be Peter Strawson's influential article "Freedom and Resentment" (Strawson, 1962). Fischer often talks as if he supports an indirect argument for the existence of free will; see Fischer (2006), particularly chapters 2, 3, and 5. However, as shown later, Fischer also advances a direct answer to the existence question as well.
- 17 Manuel Vargas suggests, in personal correspondence, that Nietzsche may offer an indirect proof for the nonexistence of free will. Vargas suggests that Nietzsche "thinks that free will might be sufficient for moralized blaming, but he's independently skeptical about moralized blaming (e.g. on an interpretation where he's an error-theorist about morality in general), so there is good reason to be dubious that free will in the "superlative metaphysical sense" can be had. Of course, he goes on to attack that notion on independent reason, but I wonder if he isn't at least implicitly committed . . . to an argument of the [indirect] sort." For a related discussion, see Leiter (2010).
- 18 In personal correspondence, Manuel Vargas suggests that there is another way direct arguments for the existence of free will could go, which he calls "arguments from paradigm cases." On such an approach, one says that a particular case is obviously an instance of moral responsibility (and thus, on the definition of free will adopted above, a case of free will), and then works out an error theory about why others would ever doubt the existence of moral responsibility and free will. Peter Strawson's work would be one example of such an approach.
- 19 A number of the works in which Fischer develops and defends his compatibilist view of free will are co-authored with Mark Ravizza. Given that this view is further refined by Fischer in more recent single-authored work, in what follows I will refer to the view primarily as Fischer's account.
- 20 Similarly, Michael McKenna writes: "I believe that theirs is the best case for compatibilism to date" (McKenna, 2005, p. 132).
- 21 In particular, Fischer is inclined to accept the soundness of van Inwagen's Consequence Argument which argues that if determinism is true, then no one ever has the freedom to choose otherwise.
- 22 See, for instance, Fischer (2006, chs 2 and 6).

- 23 In Fischer et al. (2007, p. 4) there is a chart attributing belief in the existence of free will to Fischer.
- 24 The Consequence Argument is presented in van Inwagen (1983, ch. III). For further discussions of the Consequence Argument, see Huemer (2000), Baker (2008), and van Inwagen (2004). The latter also has the distinction of perhaps being the most entertaining read in the free will literature.
- 25 For an extended elaboration and defense of this argument, see Kane (1996), especially chapter 7.
- 26 For a related discussion of the connection between free will and moral character, see Pawl and Timpe (2009).
- 27 The name "Anne" is given to the business woman by Pereboom (2008b, p. 102).
- 28 For a criticism of Kane's business-woman example, see (Pereboom, 2008b, pp. 101–5).
- 29 Positions which engage in Categorical Denials are often referred to as Free Will Impossibilism.
- 30 For a further discussion of Pereboom's manipulation argument, see Pereboom (2001), particularly chapter 4.
- 31 A third view holds that the required indeterminism is of neither of these sorts of causation, instead holding that free will requires no positive causal contribution at all. On some such views, exercising the kind of control at issue in free will need not be understood causally at all. For a recent defense of such a noncausal view, see Goetz (2009). A very worthwhile discussion of these species of libertarian views is found in Clarke (2005).
- 32 Smilansky's view is more complex than is indicated here, in part due to his denial that there is just one kind of free will: "compatibilism and incompatibilism are indeed logically inconsistent, but it is possible to hold a mixed, intermediate position that is not fully consistent with either" (Smilansky, 2002, p. 491). For a full description and defense of his view, see Smilansky (2000).
- 33 More specifically, Strawson has in mind what he calls "true ultimate responsibility": "responsibility and desert of such a kind that it can exist if and only if punishment and reward can be fair or just without having any pragmatic justification, or indeed any justification that appeals to the notion of distributive justice" (Strawson, 2002, p. 452). Strawson also defines true moral responsibility as "responsibility of such a kind that, if we have it, then it makes sense, at least, to suppose that it could be just to punish some of us with (eternal) torment in hell and reward others with (eternal) bliss in heaven" (Strawson, 1994, p. 9). Strawson appears to think these two definitions are equivalent; however, see Clarke (2005, p. 20) for an argument that they are not.
- 34 I would like to thank Matt Talbert and Manuel Vargas for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

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10 God

Graham Oppy

There are at least two different kinds of significant metaphysical questions about God. At any rate, there are two different kinds of significant metaphysical questions about God that I propose to take up in this chapter. These metaphysical questions are related to two importantly different kinds of arguments about the existence of God: those that argue against the existence of God on the basis of claimed inconsistency in the notion of God—or claimed incompatibility between the claim that God exists and other claims plausibly supposed to be true—and those that argue for the existence of God on the basis of inference to the best explanation from claims plausibly supposed to be true.

One kind of significant metaphysical question about God arises in connection with the following schema:

- (A) It is doxastically possible that X is at least partly explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God or the like.

The significant metaphysical question about God that arises in connection with this schema is this: Are there false instances of it? That is, are there Xs for which it is the case that it is not even doxastically possible that those Xs are at least partly explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God or the like? Are there Xs for which it is logically inconsistent, logically incoherent or broadly logically impossible to suppose that those Xs are at least partly explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God, or the like?

Another kind of significant metaphysical question about God arises in connection with the following schema:

- (B) X is best explained by the existence of God, an aspect of God, an action of God, or the like.

The significant metaphysical question about God that arises in connection with this schema is this: Are there true instances of it? That is, are there Xs for which

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