

Determinism and Free Will

It seems obvious that “what is done cannot be undone”. In other words, nothing that has already happened can be changed or prevented now. It is impossible, in the present, to alter in any way anything that has already happened. It is a necessary truth that the past is now fixed or closed.

We have an entirely different attitude about the future. Not only can we imagine many alternative ways in which the future may happen, most of us would say that more than one of these alternative courses of future events is possible in a sense of “possible” that is richer than just “logically possible”. We are strongly inclined to regard the future as open.

To say that it is logically possible that some event E will happen at time T just means that this statement is not logically contradictory and that it does not logically entail any contradiction. Suppose John is offered a job with IBM. The offer is made on a Friday and he is given the weekend to think it over. The statement “John accepts the offer on Monday” is not logically contradictory. It does not matter when that statement is made, it will never be logically contradictory at any time. Even if John turns down the offer on Monday, the statement “John accepts the offer on Monday” is still not logically contradictory; it is just a false statement if it is made on that day and he turns down the offer on that day. But most of us would add that, even if the statement does become false on Monday, it will forever remain a statement which might have been true instead. No logically contradictory statement could ever be true at any time under any circumstances. When we say that some false statement might have been true or that some true statement might have been false, we mean something more than just that it is not logically contradictory. What we mean beyond this minimal sort of possibility is hard to pin down but we can get closer to our meaning by thinking about some examples.

1) The UN observation team defeats the entire Taliban military force using only hand-to-hand tactics.

2) George Bush jumps from the Earth to the Moon in one motion using only the power of his own legs.

Neither (1) nor (2) is logically contradictory. Nevertheless, hardly anyone would allow that either statement could be true, even if we saw them as headlines in some newspaper. We would be certain that it was a mistake or a joke.

Now consider these:

3) Tornado hits Witchita

4) Snowstorm buries Oswego

Again, neither 3) nor 4) is logically contradictory. They or their negations could be true. That means that, if, for example, they both are printed in a newspaper in advance of the time when these events are expected, but the events don't actually occur, we would still say that they might have been true and we would be asserting more than just the logical possibility of their being true. If we try to explain what we mean by saying that they might have been true we don't just say that the statements are not logically contradictory, we say things like

3a) Had the tornado not veered a little to the south, it would have hit Witchita.

4a) Had the high pressure ridge in the atmosphere over Quebec not weakened, the storm would have buried Oswego.

In both (3a) and (4a) we are saying that, had conditions prior to the time in question been different in certain ways, the events that did not occur would have occurred. That they did not occur was something that

depended on what kinds of prior conditions occurred. In cases like these, whether some conditions, C1, occur depends on whether other kinds of conditions, C2, occur at or before the time C1 occur. In the case of 3a) and 4a) we are saying that the weather events in question depend causally on the occurrence of other weather events.

What is it for one event or condition to depend causally on another event or condition? Answering that question is a lot harder than asking it. But we can't afford to just ignore it.

At least the beginnings of an answer might go like this.

Event E1 depends causally on event E2 only if

(i) had E2 not occurred, E1 would not have occurred and

(ii) were any event E3 to occur and be exactly similar to E2, then some event E4, exactly similar to E1, would occur.

The second clause is a generalization: All events of a certain type T1 are such that, were an event of type T1 to occur, another event of another type T2 would occur. The second clause implies and explains the first. The tornado's veering away from Wichita is a particular event. To say that that particular event's occurrence depends causally on some other events or conditions means that the movements of the tornado and various other conditions are related under some causal generalization. The tornado's motion on that day is a particular event, but it is an event of a general type. There are other particular events of the same type (southward drift of a tornadic system). The conditions on which that event depended causally are also of a general type (strengthening of a region of high pressure). To say that the one particular event depended causally on the other particular event logically entails that all events of the first general type are such that, if one of them were to occur, then an event of the second general type would occur.

We are strongly inclined to believe that all particular events in nature are instances of general types which are causally related to each other. Let us call such causal generalizations Natural Laws or Laws of Nature.

Under one interpretation, a law of nature is a generalization to which there are no exceptions. This means that any event of type T1 is causally sufficient for the occurrence of an event of type T2, anywhere, at any time in the past, present or future. Given the occurrence of an event of the one type, the occurrence of an event of the other type is causally necessary. If we were puzzled as to why some event happened, we might go on for a long time without success in our attempt to find a cause for it. We might get discouraged and give up. What we would not accept without a struggle is any suggestion that it had no cause whatever.

When we say that the snowstorm was caused to occur do we mean that the snowstorm's occurrence was necessary or inevitable? If we place an ordinary piece of paper in a 2000 degree blast furnace for an hour, it cannot remain unaffected. Its burning in that environment is necessary. What does this necessity mean? Does it mean that the piece of paper could not have remained intact after that time no matter what? No. At most, it means that the burning of the paper was causally necessary, once it had been placed in the furnace and stayed there for a certain length of time. All causal necessity is conditional necessity. To say that E2's occurrence was causally necessary does not mean that E2 was necessary in itself, no matter what else may have occurred. It means that E2 was causally necessary, given E1. Without E1, E2 may not have occurred. It was necessary on condition that E1 occurred.

We can always admit the possibility that some natural event might have not occurred, but only if it is assumed that conditions of a type that are causally sufficient for it have not occurred. Of course, in the tornado example, the weather conditions that would have been causally sufficient for the tornado to stay on a path to Wichita did not remain

stable. Those conditions deteriorated and that deterioration itself is an event which must have happened as a result of some other cause. Given the occurrence of some other conditions, it was causally necessary that the former conditions changed. And so it goes with regard to causal necessities. No one link in the chain of natural events is necessary of itself but each is necessary, given the prior link.

If the account of causal dependence given so far is right, particular events cause other particular events only if the occurrences of those events are instances of natural laws; i.e., their occurrence is lawful.

Determinism is the philosophical thesis that, for every particular event, there is some other event or condition which is causally sufficient for that event's occurrence. Stated this way, though, Determinism seems to be merely common sense.

Is this attitude about the universal causation of all events consistent with the rest of our common sense beliefs? Many philosophers have argued that it is not consistent with another very strong common sense belief. This is the belief that, for many of our actions, we could have acted otherwise than we did. We think of these actions as ones that we have performed freely. Perhaps there are some human actions that are not performed freely. Someone who is delirious with fever and shouts out various words or phrases incoherently is doing something, but we may have reasonable doubts as to whether they are in control of themselves and capable of acting differently in this instance.

We may have similar, even stronger, doubts about things like sneezing, blinking, twitching, etc.

In the case of the latter, there seems to be no difficulty in explaining why we would not want to call them free actions. They are not actions at all. They are bodily events or bodily movements but they are not actions because they are not done deliberately or voluntarily. Twitching is a

kind of motion that happens to my finger after I have injured it but it is not something that I am doing.

We have very strong intuitions about actions that are performed deliberately and voluntarily but these intuitions are not always clear or well examined. One of the strongest of these is that people are responsible for what they do deliberately and voluntarily. If a deliberate, voluntary action is one that we hold to be morally wrong or illegal we commonly insist that people who perform such actions deliberately be blamed and, perhaps, punished for their actions.

It is not easy to see how this intuition about deliberate, voluntary action can be logically compatible with a belief in determinism. If all events are conditionally causally necessary and human actions are events, i.e. deliberate bodily movements, then all human actions are conditionally causally necessary. Human actions are just as much a part of the network of causally connected events in nature as snowstorms, tornadoes or lunar eclipses. We do not consider tornadoes to be morally blameworthy even if the consequences of a tornado's movements may be devastating to many human beings. Given the weather conditions prior to the formation of the tornado, its movements were causally necessary and could not have taken place any differently from the way they in fact did.

Now, given the mental and physical state of a person just prior to their performing some action, such as punching another person in the nose, doesn't a belief in determinism logically require the conclusion that those mental and physical conditions of that person were causally sufficient for that action? Given those conditions, the determinist would say, that action could not have failed to occur. It was causally necessary just as much as the movement of the tornado was casually necessary. How can we consider the one who punches his neighbor in the nose morally blameworthy if he could not have acted differently in those conditions?

We may decide, at first, that, in view of this problem, either our intuitive belief in moral responsibility or our intuitive belief in determinism has to be abandoned because they are not logically compatible.

Suppose we are so convinced (as many people are) of the importance of holding people morally responsible for some of their actions that we decide that it is determinism that has to be abandoned or at least amended. We might say that determinism is to be understood as a generalization that is true for the most part or usually. Deliberate human actions are exceptions to determinism. Epicurus, the ancient Greek materialist, held this sort of view. Everything, he said, is made of atoms and the motions of atoms are the causes of everything. Yet some of our actions are free, according to Epicurus because some motions of atoms are spontaneous, uncaused swervings or deviations from a straight line. Free action is incompatible with universal causation but some actions are free so they must be events that are uncaused. That would mean that not all events are caused but, perhaps, there is no great sacrifice in allowing that causation is not strictly universal. Can we reasonably define free actions as those which have no cause whatever? It may seem so at first because it appears to provide a plausible explanation of the difference between free actions and strictly determined events like snowstorms.

Given enough information about prior conditions and meteorological laws, a snowstorm could be predicted with certainty. But deliberate human actions are not like that. No human action could ever be predicted with certainty. The thesis that these actions are uncaused explains why they are not predictable with certainty. No uncaused event could ever be predicted. The reason why free actions can't be predicted is precisely because they are uncaused. We might call this theory of Freedom "Indeterminism". Is Indeterminism a satisfactory theory?

Very few philosophers have considered Indeterminism to be a satisfactory theory of free action. To see why, imagine that, in the

midst of a gathering of friends and acquaintances, you suddenly go down on your knees and begin reciting the Gettysburg address. After suffering great embarrassment, your friends ask if you are all right. They ask if this was some sort of practical joke or stunt you are doing to live up to the terms of some wager you had made with someone, etc. Suppose that you are just as baffled by your own behavior as everyone else. You have yourself examined by a team of physicians, physiologists, psychologists, psychiatrists and other experts on human behavior. Suppose that after lengthy and thorough examination they can find no cause for your behavior. Now, if a philosopher were to say to them and to you, "You have missed the most obvious explanation of all. Some behaviors have no cause whatever. This was a free action on your part.", wouldn't we dismiss this Philosopher's statement as based on a foolish notion of what a free action is? If this behavior were absolutely uncaused, it would mean that you had nothing to do with it. None of your desires, none of your intentions, none of your beliefs, nothing about you had anything to do with the occurrence of this behavior. It would be utterly unexplainable and you would probably be worried about recurrences of such behavior on your part as would others who had witnessed it.

We do not consider the kinds of actions we ordinarily classify as free to be absolutely inexplicable even if we are not sure of how to explain them at the time. Puzzlement about someone's behavior (including your own) would be far greater if we could somehow know that it was entirely lacking in any cause than if we simply were not sure of what its cause was. We would not classify such behavior as free any more than we would classify a random twitching of a little finger as a free action. Even if we were prepared to allow for exceptions to the rule of universal causation, it is implausible to think that this concession provides a defensible theory of free action.

That decision about Indeterminism puts us back to square one: how can Determinism be compatible with our intuitive belief that we freely perform some of our actions?

Philosophers divide into different camps on this question. There are those who argue that they are not compatible; that one or the other must be abandoned or modified. Some philosophers argue that they are compatible; that when each one is properly understood, they are both logically consistent with one another. Call those in the first camp Incompatibilists and those in the second camp Compatibilists.

Matters are not quite that neat, however. Incompatibilists are of two very different sorts. One sort of incompatibilist argues that it is our intuitive belief in freedom that must be abandoned. They say that, since belief in free actions are simply myths or leftover relics of our primitive, prescientific past culture, all of the logically connected beliefs in such things as responsibility, moral blameworthiness, moral criticism and punishment must also be discarded along with such concepts as witchcraft and demonology. Call these incompatibilists Hard Determinists.

Another sort of incompatibilist is the philosopher who argues that discarding the whole idea of moral responsibility, and moral praise or blame is simply too high of a price to pay for accepting any metaphysical theory about anything. If Freedom is a necessary condition of moral responsibility then Freedom is a rationally necessary postulate in our philosophy. The more rational philosophical alternative is to examine the meaning of causation and, if possible, to clarify or amend the principle of universal causation so that, without falling into Indeterminism, some revised version of universal causation can be made compatible with belief in free action. Call these incompatibilists Libertarians.

Clearly, a Libertarian must deny some version of the principle of universal causation or he would not be an incompatibilist. On the other hand, Libertarians reject Indeterminism, too.

The Libertarian position depends on a distinction between two sorts of causation. One sort of causation is a relation between types of events, processes or conditions. It is this sort of causation we have defined in the preceding section. To say that event E1 causes event E2 logically entails that the occurrence of these events is an instance of a natural law which says that, everything else being the same, an event of the same type as E2 would occur if an event of the same type as E1 were to occur. Given this law and the occurrence of an E1-type event, the occurrence of an E2-type event is necessary. Call the latter sort of causation Nomic causation. (Based on the Greek word 'nomos' meaning 'law') The only way that one can be an incompatibilist who denies Indeterminism is to argue for the existence of a type of causation other than the type which is instantiation of natural laws (i.e., nomic causation). Libertarians commonly refer to this other type of causation as Agent causation. Free actions are those which are caused by the agent who performs them rather than by any event, process or condition.

A more precise description of the Libertarian's position, therefore, would be that Libertarians are incompatibilists on the contest between Free action and Nomic Causation but might be classified as compatibilists (in an extended sense of the term) on the relation between Free action and Agent causation. In general, it is wiser to describe Libertarians as incompatibilists because the classical issue of Freedom vs. Determinism is over the compatibility of Free action and the universality of Nomic causation. More will be said about Agent causation in some of the pages that follow.

A compatibilist in the strict sense would be someone who argues that there is no reason to believe in any sort of causation but nomic causation and that the universality of Nomic causation is compatible with belief in Free action. Such philosophers are sometimes referred to as Soft Determinists. When that term is used in these pages, it is not meant to imply that these philosophers are soft-headed, lax or weak-minded. The term is simply a helpful way of reminding us of an important contrast between two types of Determinism.

Perhaps because it reminds one of the idea of having one's cake and eating it too, Soft Determinism has been very popular in recent philosophy. As far back as Hobbes, Locke and Hume, various versions of Soft Determinism has been developed and defended. Of course, it has been attacked from both sides as well. An exploration of Soft Determinism will be useful at this stage because it will also shed light on the positions of its critics.

The first point that Soft Determinists are eager to make is that their belief that all actions are caused should not be understood to mean that we will necessarily act in whatever we do in spite of any attempts we may make to avoid acting in that way. That idea is the position known as Fatalism. Fatalism is the general metaphysical thesis that each event is unconditionally necessary or necessary in itself. No course of events other than the actual course of events is even possible. The Fatalist's thinking can be illustrated by this example. A man walking through Central Park is either going to be mugged or he is not going to be mugged. If he is going to be mugged then any precautions he may take will be ineffective. If he is not going to be mugged, then any precautions he may take are superfluous. Therefore, it is pointless to take precautions.

Soft Determinists (and Libertarians) criticize Fatalism on the following grounds. It is just a plain and obvious empirical fact that people are more likely to get mugged in Central Park if they take no precautions than if they do take precautions. Statistics show that, even though taking certain kinds of precautions (e.g., walking in groups or bringing a big dog or a squadron of armed bodyguards with you) is not a guarantee against getting mugged in Central Park, more of the people who do get mugged are people who did not take such precautions. The Fatalist is committed to the absurd idea that human actions have no consequences. Clearly, some things happen because of what people do that would not have happened if they had not done them. The Fatalist is safe in reciting slogans like "Whatever will be will be", but he turns his back on the fact

that human beings do play a role in determining what things will happen. What the future will be depends in part on what we do in the present. A great deal of empirical evidence is against Fatalism. It is hard to think of any empirical evidence that actually supports Fatalism. The Fatalist's whole case depends on the a priori truth that either A is going to happen or A is not going to happen. That statement cannot be false, but it is used in a misleading way by the Fatalist. When he recites this slogan, he conveniently does not include the phrase "No matter what anyone does". So, his slogan without that phrase sounds like an a priori truth, but it really should be stated as "Either A is going to happen, no matter what any one does or A is not going to happen, no matter what any one does" Stated in that way, the slogan of Fatalism is plainly false.

The second point that Soft Determinists are eager to make is that the notion of actions being caused should not be confused with either compulsion or constraint of actions. It is quite true that acting freely logically requires not acting under compulsion or constraint. Being compelled to do something is being forced to do it against your will. If someone lives under a tyrannical dictatorship and they are forced to do things like pay heavy taxes or work unceasingly on huge public projects like building pyramids, then such actions are not done freely. This is a social and political sense of freedom often referred to as "liberty". One is socially and politically free only if he or she is not under someone else's control. Similarly, in this same sense of "free", someone who is tied up with ropes and is made to watch others being tortured cannot be said to be freely allowing the torture to happen because he is constrained from intervening.

Absence of compulsion or constraint is a negative sort of freedom. We also speak of Freedom as something positive; as, roughly, having some ability. You are free to do those things that you can do if you choose to do them. In this sense, you are free to pick up a feather but you are not free to jump across Lake Ontario. Clearly, no one is completely free in

either the positive or the negative sense. Everyone is under some constraints. Everyone is compelled to do some things. Everyone lacks a great number of abilities. There are degrees of freedom and the degree to which a person is free will vary from person to person and from time to time. Our question is not about how much freedom this or that person has but whether universal causation is compatible with there being even one free action anywhere, anytime.

Soft Determinists defend the claim of compatibility. Their argument goes essentially like this. The way in which causation and freedom are compatible can be seen from the clues contained in the criticism of Indeterminism and Fatalism and from the distinction between the two (negative and positive) types of freedom. Some of my actions do have something to do with me. What the future will be like does depend in part on me. In many situations, I can do things other than those that I in fact do. The way in which I do make a difference to future events and can do a variety of things is compatible with my actions being caused since the causes of my free actions are my own decisions or choices.

If an action of mine is caused by my own decision or choice and it is done without constraint or compulsion, that covers the negative sense in which I act freely. I am free in the positive sense, too, if I could have chosen to act otherwise. That I could have chosen to act differently can be seen by considering why I made the choice I did. If I chose to walk through the park at night and was not compelled to do so, there may have been a reason why I chose to go then rather than some other time. Suppose that I believe that I can get to where I want to go faster if I go through the park and I want to get there as fast as possible. That belief plus that desire explain my choice to act as I did. That belief plus that desire are the cause of my choosing to walk through the park at that time. Could I have chosen to act differently at that time? Yes, because to say that I could have chosen differently means I would have chosen differently, had my beliefs or desires been different. My choice was the direct cause of my actions. My choice was, in turn, caused by the belief plus the desire.

Different causes, different effects. That means my actions and choices and their antecedents fit into a structure of causal explanation just as all other events do. Yet there is no incompatibility between this causation and the freedom of the action. Indeed, freedom actually depends on causation of the right kind. When my actions are caused by my own internal states of choice, desire and belief, they are freely performed. When the causes of my actions are not the right kind of internal states, i.e., when the internal states are delusions, intoxication or a violent fit of rage, the actions I perform are not free. When they are caused by external factors such as threats or physical force, they are not freely performed. As we have seen in the discussion of Indeterminism, defining free actions as uncaused behaviors only makes matters worse. Trying to ignore or deny the obvious importance of human decisions in explaining actions as Fatalists do is just as foolish. What greater freedom could we want than that our acts are caused by our decisions? Soft Determinism, according to its defenders, is a reasonable middle-ground position. All the other positions have highly implausible implications.

Of course, Soft Determinists face plenty of criticism from both sorts of incompatibilist.

Some of these criticisms are as follows:

(1) Perhaps our actions are caused by our decisions and these in turn are caused by our desires and beliefs. What about these desires? They, too, are caused if nomic causation is universal.

They are caused by such factors as hereditary predisposition, our early environment, the habits formed in our childhood as a result of discipline and training we receive. We had no control over these. If our desires are caused by circumstances over which we have no control, how can the actions caused by those desires be considered free?

A possible reply to this criticism would be that not all of our desires are beyond our power to control or change. If we could have desired differently, then a desire does not make a decision unfree by causing it. Some very strong, long-standing desires, such as an addict's desire for

drugs may be impossible to resist or overcome without extensive therapy and treatment. There are degrees of freedom and we have more freedom with respect to some of our actions and desires than others. It would be a mistake to suppose that our desires destroy our freedom because we have not specifically chosen the desire that presently moves us. We would have to want a different desire in order to choose a different one but what would then be the cause of our wanting a different desire? Another choice and another desire? An infinite regress looms. We should not demand that the causes of our choices also be specifically chosen by us as a condition of free action. Such a demand makes no sense. To do what we want by choice and without compulsion just is acting freely. The fact that our present desires may not have been chosen by us is simply irrelevant.

(2) If determinism is true then nomic causation holds for all events. Consequently, no one could do anything other than what they in fact do given the total set of circumstances that led to the action. Human actions are no different in this respect than earthquakes. Difficult to predict, perhaps, but once we have enough information after an earthquake about the circumstances in which it happened, we see that it could not have failed to occur. If soft determinists are determinists in any plausible sense of the word, they ought to drop the word “soft” and admit that they are really just Hard Determinists in a flimsy disguise.

A Soft determinist could reply as follows: You say that being a determinist means that on any particular occasion I could not have done anything but what I did. ‘Can’ and ‘could’ are ability-words. To say that I can do something is to say that I am able to do it. That I am able to stand up means that I will stand up if I decide to. It is not true that at any specific moment in my life I am able only to do the thing I actually do. I am able right now to do a variety of things and I will do one of them, depending on which I decide to do.

“But”, the Incompatibilists retort, “given the circumstances in which you find yourself now, could you have wanted anything different?” Since

you are a determinist and you maintain that nomic causation covers all events, don't you have to admit that, given just the circumstances you are in at the moment; your total physiological and psychological state, you could not have desired anything other than what you did?"

A soft determinist is likely to reply to this question by offering more opinions on the meaning of "could have". If it just means it is logically possible that my present desire be for something other than what I now desire, then the answer is "Of course I could have wanted something different since there would be no logical contradiction in the attribution of a different desire to me. If, however, "could have" means, is it psychologically possible for me to desire things other than what I now desire, then the answer is that of course I could desire other things, since my psychological makeup does not rule them out. If the question is : is it psychologically possible for me to desire something else, given exactly my present psychological makeup and exactly my present circumstances, the issue becomes: Would I, in exactly similar circumstances, want exactly the same thing? The more similar causes are, the more similar their effects will be.

Under pressure of such criticisms as these, the soft determinist is pulled in two directions at once. One direction is toward Hard Determinism. The more the soft determinist makes it appear that the mental states which cause our choices and actions are caused by things other than our own desires, beliefs, etc., the more it appears that we could not have chosen and acted differently than we in fact have because those causal antecedents of our actions were causally necessary given their causal antecedents, and so on.

So, in order to defend compatibilism, the Soft Determinist may increase emphasis on the abilities and powers of agents to control their desires and to their abilities to control their own bodily actions. To the extent that a Soft determinist emphasizes this idea of free action, he/she is getting closer to embracing an idea of a different sort of causation.

The Theory of Agency

We often speak loosely about causes and effects, saying, for example, “The bruise on my arm was caused by a stone”. In the first place, we don’t mean to imply that the stone did something to the arm, certainly not in the sense in which we say that people or other animals do things, i.e., perform actions. Speaking more carefully, we would say something like “The falling of the stone on my arm caused a bruising of the arm”. That which we mean by the cause and that which we mean by the effect in such cases are events, rather than particular substances. It is types of events which are covered by Natural Laws. Is it only events which can correctly be called causes?

Libertarians say that agents themselves, in performing actions, are causes of those actions.

The movement of a stone may be caused by the movement of a stick.

The movement of the stick

may be caused by the movement of the hand that grasps it but the movement of the hand is caused by the agent whose hand it is. No event is uncaused. For every event, there is a prior event which was the sufficient cause of its occurrence. Since agents are not events but living animals, it is a conceptual mistake to suppose that agents themselves are effects of causes. It is only with regard to events that nomic causation is universal. An agent’s birth or conception is an event. The drowning of an agent is an event. Births, conceptions, drownings may all legitimately be said to be events which are the effects of some other events. These are all events in which an agent is passive. Something happens to the agent. An agent per se is not an event but an animal. Agents, by performing actions, may initiate a series of event-causes and event-effects. But the agent’s performing an action is an event which is the effect, not of another event, but of an agent. The performing of an action by an agent is something which the agent had within his power to do.

It is important to be clear about what the Libertarian is saying about agent causation as opposed to event causation and why the contrast is supposed to be important for the Libertarian.

If my choices were the effects of certain events inside me, say, events occurring in some cells of my brain, or even events occurring in a nonphysical soul of the kind Descartes believed in, then there is no escaping the argument of Determinism and there is no free choice or action, argues the Libertarian. If my actions are caused by any events or states even events or states that are internal to me then these events or states must themselves have causes, which are events which have prior causes, and so on. Some of these prior causes must be impossible for me to alter since they have already taken place before my present thoughts and desires arise. If these desires, in turn, are what cause my choice then my choice and my action are causally necessary in relation to those desires. So, I could never act otherwise than as I do. The only way any of our actions could be free is if we ourselves as agents cause our choices and actions. One author puts the matter as follows:

In the case of an action that is free, it must be such that it is caused by the agent who performs it, but such that no antecedent conditions were sufficient for his performing just that action. In the case of an action that is both free and rational, it must be such that the agent who performed it did so for some reason, but this reason cannot have been the cause of it. Now this conception fits what men take themselves to be, namely, beings who act or who are agents rather than things that are merely acted upon and whose behavior is simply the causal consequence of conditions which they have not wrought. When I believe that I have done something, I do believe that it was I who caused it to be done, I who made something happen and not merely something within me such as one of my own subjective states, which is not identical with myself. (Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*. p. 50)

This makes it clear that Both Hard and Soft Determinism are incompatible with the Libertarian conception of free action. Of course, Libertarians do not deny that some human behaviors are caused by

circumstances, events, etc., both internal and internal to an agent. When someone is delirious with fever, affected by powerful drugs, under hypnosis, fanatically dedicated to the aims of some cult which has bombarded him with propoganda for years, etc., it may be inaccurate to think that they are in contol of their own behavior.

All that Libertarians claim is that, if a person is ever to be held responsible for anything that they have done, then it must be the case that they could have acted differently and, so, that it was within their power to act differently. This consequence means that only if the agent himself or herself is the cause of the action can it be a free action. Keep the entire state of the universe the same as it was before the agent acted, the agent acts freely only if he or she then had it within their power to do something else.

The question, of course, is whether there actually is any such causation as agent causation. If circumstances and events, internal or external, cause our actions then, says the Libertarian, no one acts freely and no one is ever responsible for what they do. If it is a certain fact, as some Libertarians argue, that we are responsible and deserve praise or blame for some of our actions then we as agents cause those actions and nothing other than the agent causes them to happen.

That seems to leave the matter looking like a stand- off, but there is much more to the classical debate. Determinists may argue that more and more of human behavior is being understood by nomic causal explanation all the time. The idea of agents being autonomous (a law unto themselves) is obviously incompatible with nomic explanation and, so, the determinist argues, as the social sciences progress, it becomes increasingly unlikely that there is any causation other than nomic causation.

The Libertarian, however, may retort that there is, so far, little or no evidence that there are sufficient causal conditions for such ordinary actions as writing a letter or making a phone call.

There is so far no such thing as a psychological law to the effect that, under so-and-so conditions, this agent will write a letter to his grandmother using just these words in this order, etc. The only causal laws known so far in the history of science which explain the behavior of agents are laws that explain the agent's behavior when he or she is passive in the event, e.g. blinking, yawning, hiccuping, fainting, etc. It is just an unsupportable assumption of determinism that there must be causal conditions sufficient for an agent's performing even the most ordinary of actions.