



Freedom

Freedom is the property of being free from constraints, especially from external constraints on our actions, but also from internal constraints such as physical disabilities or addictions. Political freedoms, such as the right to speak, to assemble, and the limits to government constraints on associations and organizations such as media and religions, are examples of external freedom.

ISAIAH BERLIN called this kind of freedom “negative” in his essay *Two Concepts of Liberty*.

I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity. Political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others. If I am prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do, I am to that degree unfree.¹

Philosophers call this absence of external and internal constraints “**freedom of action.**” But there is another, more philosophical form of liberty that Berlin called “positive freedom.”

I wish to be the instrument of my own, not of other men’s, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own... I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and purposes.²

This kind of positive liberty raises the ancient question of “freedom of the will.” One can be free to act, that is, be free of constraints, but one’s will might be **pre-determined** by events in the past and the laws of nature.

Quite apart from whether we are free to act, are we free to will our actions?

This is the question that philosophers have not been able to resolve in twenty-two centuries of philosophical analysis.

1 Berlin (1990) p. 122. This is sometimes called “freedom from.”

2 Berlin (1990) p. 131. Sometimes called “freedom to.”



This book is based on parts of the Freedom section of the website INFORMATION PHILOSOPHER, a critical study of the “problem of free will.” (www.informationphilosopher.com/freedom)

Those parts of the Freedom section that could not fit in this book will appear in two forthcoming volumes. *Free Will: The Core Concepts* will include the web pages devoted to over 60 critically important concepts needed to understand the free will debates. *Free Will: The Philosophers and Scientists* will excerpt the I-PHI web pages on 135 philosophers and 65 scientists.

There I have researched the arguments of hundreds of philosophers and scientists on the question of free will, from the original philosophical debates among the ancient Greeks down to the current day. They are presented on my I-PHI web pages, with some source materials in the original languages, for use by students and scholars everywhere, without asking me for permission to quote.

Some readers might want to skip ahead to Chapter 7, the History of the Free Will Problem. There you can try to develop your own ideas on how and why this problem has been thought insoluble, even unintelligible, for over two millennia.

If you don't mind being biased a bit, and would like a little guidance as you try to make more sense of the problem than hundreds of great thinkers have been able to do, I present briefly in this and the next chapter two of my ideas that you may want to study first and have in mind as you read the History chapter.

The First Idea - *against* libertarian free will

The first is a very strong logical argument against libertarian free will that I have found again and again in philosophy since ancient times. I call it the **standard argument** *against* free will.

If you fully master the standard argument, and perhaps even learn to detect its flaws, you will be more likely to recognize it in its various forms, and under a wide variety of names.

I believe that the standard argument was the main stumbling block to a coherent solution of the free will problem long ago.



In the next chapter, I provide examples of the standard argument taken from the work of over thirty philosophers, from CICERO to ROBERT KANE, over twenty-two centuries. I am sure there are others. Perhaps you will come across them in your readings. If so, I would very much like to hear from you about them.

The Second Idea - *for* libertarian free will

The second thing you might want to keep in mind is what looks to me to be, after twenty-two centuries of sophisticated discussion, the most plausible and practical solution to the free-will problem.

Please excuse my hubris to think that *I* have solved a 2200-year old problem, one that has escaped so many great minds. Despite JOHN SEARLE's cry of no progress, I have found steps toward the solution in nearly twenty fine minds. They just failed to convince their contemporaries, and I find that few of them have read their predecessors as carefully as I have.³

If you don't want to be aware of my opinions before you begin, just skip ahead to Chapter 4 for more on the **standard argument**.

Almost all philosophers and scientists have a preferred solution to any problem. It very likely biases their work. You almost certainly bring your own views to all your reading and research. If you want to read the free will history unbiased by my views, skip to Chapter 7. If you want a brief introduction to my libertarian free-will model before proceeding, read on.

3 If you don't remember the past, you don't deserve to be remembered by the future



Two Requirements for Free Will

Any plausible model for free will must separately attack the two branches of the **standard argument** against **libertarian** free will.

The foremost libertarian, Robert Kane, says that anyone wanting to show that free will is **incompatible** with **determinism** must successfully climb over what he calls “Incompatibilist Mountain.” I take the liberty of time-reversing Kane’s ascending and descending stages here, for reasons that will become clear later.



Figure 3-1. Robert Kane’s Incompatibilist Mountain (reversed)

I like Kane’s division of the one “incompatibilism” problem into two.⁴ Although we will see that Kane thinks libertarian free will is focused in a single moment at the end of the decision process, his diagram shows that the upward and downward climbs of his metaphorical mountain deserve separate treatment.

First Requirement

The first, ascent, requirement is for a limited indeterminism. It must provide randomness enough to break the causal chain of determinism. Even more critical, it must be the indeterminism needed to generate creative thoughts and **alternative possibilities** for action. So why and how must it be limited? Because the indeterminism must not destroy our **moral responsibility**, by making our actions random.

So to make sense of indeterminist free will as we ascend the reversed incompatibilist mountain, we must demand that the indeterministic **alternative possibilities** are not normally the **direct cause of our actions**.

⁴ But I don’t like the term “incompatibilism,” as explained on p. 60 in Chapter 6. Why define human freedom by saying that it conflicts with something that does not exist, except as a philosophical ideal?



Second Requirement

The second, descent, requirement is to have enough determinism to say that our actions are “determined” by our character, our values, our motives, and feelings. Again, how and why is this determinism limited? It must not be so much that our actions are **pre-determined** from well before we began deliberation, or even from before we were born.⁵

So for our descent of Incompatibilist Mountain, we can say that free will is not incompatible with a limited determinism or **determination**, but it is definitely incompatible with pre-determinism.

Our deliberations, both evaluations and selections, are “adequately” determined. We can be responsible for choices that are “up to us,” choices not determined from before deliberations.

Hobart’s Determination

R. E. HOBART (the pseudonym of DICKINSON MILLER, the student and colleague of William James) is often misquoted as requiring **determinism**. He only advocated **determination**.

Hobart did not deny **chance** in his famous *Mind* article of 1934, entitled “Free Will as Involving Determination, and Inconceivable Without It.” (It’s my second requirement.)

PHILIPPA FOOT added to the misquote confusion in the title and in the footnotes for her 1957 *Philosophical Review* article, “Free Will as Involving Determinism.” Most philosophers continue to misquote this important title.

Determinist and compatibilist philosophers, eager to support their unsupportable claims of a deterministic world, have been misquoting Hobart ever since, showing me that they do not always read the titles of their sources, never mind the original articles. If they did, they would be surprised to find that neither Hobart nor Foot was a determinist.

⁵ As claimed by the incompatibilist Peter van Inwagen’s Consequence Argument and by the impossibilist Galen Strawson’s Basic Argument.



Hobart on Indeterminism

Hobart was nervous about indeterminism. He explicitly does not endorse strict logical or physical determinism, and he explicitly does endorse the existence of **alternative possibilities**, which he says may depend on absolute chance. Remember that Hobart is writing about six years after the discovery of quantum indeterminacy, and he also refers back to the ancient philosopher Epicurus' "swerve" of the atoms.

"I am not maintaining that determinism is true...it is not here affirmed that there are no small exceptions, no slight undetermined swervings, no ingredient of absolute chance."⁶

"We say, 'I can will this or I can will that, whichever I choose'. Two courses of action present themselves to my mind. I think of their consequences, I look on this picture and on that, one of them commends itself more than the other, and I will an act that brings it about. I knew that I could choose either. That means that I had the power to choose either."⁷

Here Hobart seems to agree with his mentor and colleague WILLIAM JAMES that there are ambiguous futures. And note that Hobart, like James and using his phrase, argues that courses of action "present themselves." Our thoughts appear to "come to us" - and the will's power to choose brings the act about - our actions "come from us."

Despite his moderate position on chance, Hobart finds fault with the indeterminist's position. He gives the typical overstatement by a determinist critic, that any chance will be the direct cause of our actions, which would clearly be a loss of freedom and responsibility

"Indeterminism maintains that we need not be impelled to action by our wishes, that our active will need not be determined by them. Motives "incline without necessitating". We choose amongst the ideas of action before us, but need not choose solely according to the attraction of desire, in however wide a sense

⁶ Hobart (1934) p. 2

⁷ Hobart (1934) p. 8



that word is used. Our inmost self may rise up in its autonomy and moral dignity, independently of motives, and register its sovereign decree.

“Now, in so far as this “interposition of the self” is undetermined, the act is not its act, it does not issue from any concrete continuing self; it is born at the moment, of nothing, hence it expresses no quality; it bursts into being from no source”.⁸

Hobart is clearly uncomfortable with raw indeterminism. He says chance would produce “freakish” results if it were directly to cause our actions. He is right.

“In proportion as an act of volition starts of itself without cause it is exactly, so far as the freedom of the individual is concerned, as if it had been thrown into his mind from without — “suggested” to him — by a freakish demon. It is exactly like it in this respect, that in neither case does the volition arise from what the man is, cares for or feels allegiance to; it does not come out of him. In proportion as it is undetermined, it is just as if his legs should suddenly spring up and carry him off where he did not prefer to go. Far from constituting freedom, that would mean, in the exact measure in which it took place, the loss of freedom”.⁹

It is very likely that Hobart has WILLIAM JAMES in mind as “the indeterminist.” If so, despite knowing James very well, he is mistaken about James’ position. James would not have denied that our will is an act of determination, consistent with, and in some sense “caused by” our character and values, our habits, and our current feelings and desires. James simply wanted chance to provide a break in the causal chain of strict determinism and alternative possibilities for our actions.

8 Hobart (1934) p. 6

9 Hobart (1934) p. 7

