



“Free” and “Will” Stages of Free Will and Responsibility

The Standard Argument Against Free Will

Logical philosophers note that either Determinism is True or Indeterminism is True. (This is true.)
If Determinism is True, We Are Not Free. If Indeterminism is True, our Will is Random, they say.

Free Will is therefore *incompatible* with determinism and with indeterminism. (This is false.)

Incompatibilism (corrected)

Free Will is Incompatible with *Pre-Determinism* (causal chains from the ancient past).
If our decisions are pre-determined, they are not free.

Free Will is also Incompatible with any *Indeterminism* in the Decision of the Will.
If our decisions are random, they are not caused by our will and we are not responsible.
(excepting Bob Kane’s “torn decision,” where the agent has good reasons to go either way. ¹)

Why most philosophers are compatibilists

Given the stark, but false, choice between determinism and indeterminism in the standard argument, reasonable thinkers choose determinism so that decisions are causally connected to reasons and values. In addition, most philosophers have what William James called an “antipathy to chance.” But since physics has become indeterministic, many philosophers accept some microscopic randomness.

David Hume reconciled freedom with determinism. Can we reconcile it with indeterminism?

Compatibilism (corrected)

Free Will is Compatible with the *Adequate Determinism* we have in the world.
As R.E.Hobart said in 1934, *determination*, not pre-determinism, is required for responsibility. ²

Free Will is also Compatible with the *Limited Indeterminism* required for the generation of new ideas.
Indeterminism provides alternatives, one of which is selected by an adequately determined Will.

Free Will Redux

The Will is causally determined by reasons, desires, and motives - by character - but not *pre-determined*.

Freedom arises unpredictably from the creative indeterministic generation of alternative possibilities, which present themselves to the will for evaluation and selection.

We can manage this creativity. We can suppress the indeterminism. It is “up to us.”

Our thoughts *come to us* freely. Our actions *come/go from us* willfully.

John Locke said we must separate “free” from “will.”
“I think the question is not proper, whether the will be free, but whether a man be free.” ³

The two stages of Free Will and the two-step process of Evolution

Ernst Mayr called biological evolution a “two-step process,” in which random variations in the gene pool are followed by law-like natural selection.⁴

Free Will is a two-stage creative process – first random and “free,” then a lawful “will.”

Unlike biological evolution where the selection is “natural,” in Free Will the selection is reflective and intelligent. The mind has control over the generation of alternative possibilities. It can suppress quantum noise and also recruit it when it is needed for freedom. Even the lowest animals can turn random noise on and off, exhibiting behavioral freedom that evolved in higher animals and humans to become free will.⁵

Creativity and Free Will

Normally random noise is the enemy of information, but it can be the friend of freedom and creativity.

Many philosophers and scientists have anticipated the two-stage model,⁶ but most of them assumed chance was a single quantum event, which they could not reconcile with a rational decision.

They did not see that continuous noise (many quantum events) can generate alternative possibilities. Alternative possibilities are the source of human creativity. They make us the authors of our lives. We are most free when we dream, when we are imaginative, when we are creative.

To understand how evolution has limited the significance of quantum indeterminacy to the early stages of deliberation, but provides real freedom as late in the process of decision as the most extreme libertarian could wish (and beyond, with Bob Kane’s caveat for “torn decisions”), please see <http://www.informationphilosopher.com/freedom/cogito/>

Conclusion

In the strictly logical terms preferred by many philosophers.

Pre-Determinism is False. Adequate Determinism is True. Indeterminism is True.

Indeterminism is significant as a generator of alternative possibilities, but it is insignificant in adequately determined willed decisions.

Free Will is *Incompatible* with Pre-determinism and with Indeterminism in the Choice itself. (*pace* Kane)

Free Will is *Compatible* with Limited Indeterminism and with Adequate Determinism (Determination).

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1. Bob Kane has shown that indeterminism in a “torn decision” would make the exact choice random, but the agent could say, “I flipped a coin and am prepared to take responsibility either way.” See Kane, “Responsibility, Luck, and Chance,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 96, 5, 1999, p.225.
 2. R.E.Hobart, “Free Will as Involving Determination, and Inconceivable Without It”, *Mind*, Vol XLIII, No. 169, January, 1934, p.2; See also Philippa Foot, “Free Will as Involving Determinism,” *The Philosophical Review*, vol LXVI, 1957, p.439.
 3. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XXI, Of Power, s.21
 4. Ernst Mayr, *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology*, Harvard, 1988, p.150.
 5. Martin Heisenberg, “Is Free Will an Illusion?” *Nature* 459, 2009, pp.164-165.
 6. [William James](#) , [Henri Poincaré](#), [Arthur Holly Compton](#), [Karl Popper](#), [Daniel Dennett](#), [Henry Margenau](#), [Robert Kane](#), [Alfred Mele](#), [Bob Doyle](#), and [Martin Heisenberg](#).