Embracing Determinism: The Benefits of Rejecting Free Will Belief

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Statement of Authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

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Preface

Affirmation is the positive response to determinism; the belief that determinism is a boon, and an improvement over having free will. In this thesis, I will argue that the loss of free will, and the rejection of its illusion, can provide us with myriad benefits. Typically, one hears that internalizing the truth of determinism would make us lethargic and immoral, as society breaks down around us. Those threats are greatly overstated, whilst the positive aspects of belief in determinism are often ignored. These benefits include being more accepting, less judgemental, leading a better emotional life, expecting less, and understanding oneself.

My thesis makes some baseline assumptions. The first of these is that determinism is true. I’m not concerned with providing a defence of this assumption, as this has been done admirably elsewhere. It may well be the case the determinism is not strictly true, in the case of quantum randomness. To that, I would say that we are sufficiently determined that any minute level of randomness appears inconsequential, and certainly does not provide us a backdoor to free will. Second, I assume that we lack free will as it is typically understood. That is, the incompatibilist is correct and the libertarian is incorrect. I borrow from Honderich in arguing that the free will of the libertarian and the free will of the compatibilist are both separate and important. The positive aspects of determinism require the loss of libertarian free will, however, which is what determines denies us.

To achieve the goal of affirmation, I consider three distinct topics. First, I look at what I refer to as ‘The Defences of Free Will’, which include the ancient defences of free will, and modern Frankfurtian compatibilism. Within this section, I demonstrate the ways that compatibilist free will operates: as voluntary action, and not as free will proper.

The second chapter of this thesis deals with the supposed harms of
determinism. I focus specifically on moral responsibility and moral praise, with additional sections on guilt and life hopes. In short, I find the desirability of moral responsibility questionable, as it seems useful primarily as a tool to justify retributive punishment, which serves no purpose other than to increase the amount of suffering in the world.

The third and final chapter deals with affirmation and the positive elements of belief in determinism. These include the fulfillment of our life hopes, giving up the negative aspects of free will belief, nature and meditation, and true belief in determinism (which is its own reward). I also look at affirmation in society, including criminal justice and problems with inequality.
Chapter 1 – The Defences of Free Will

The Ancient Approaches

Before we examine the modern defences of free will, I’ll open with an examination of the ancient approaches. It can be difficult to effectively and charitably analyse the approaches to free will and determinism taken by the ancient philosophers, and the modern philosophers that continue their traditions. Part of this difficulty comes from a difference in scientific knowledge. Although some ancient theories came remarkably close to mirroring what we now take as fact, they did not have the scientific knowledge of causality that we do now. As a result, many ancient theories that would be labelled as libertarian in a modern setting had taken no real stance regarding determinism—it was simply assumed we had access to free will. Alternatively, as will be seen when considering the stoics, the question of free will and determinism was entirely absent—no true stance on the matter was taken.

The second difficulty with ancient theories regarding free will is due to the special treatment of humanity within ancient philosophy. With the evolutionary origins of humanity now well beyond doubt, suggesting that humans have access to any special faculties beyond our biology carries a great burden of proof. Prior to the theory of evolution, however, many philosophers and theologians were content to posit myriad supernatural abilities to humanity, as a means of justifying our dominance over nature, or over each other. For example, the Stoics put forward a mechanistic universe, not so unlike our modern theory of determinism. They claimed, however, that in any given situation, we have freedom whenever we exercise our powers of rationality, a kind of power only humans have access to —a reason which aligns with the reason guiding all elements of creation. The previous sentence should be sufficient to demonstrate the difficulties in critiquing the ancient theories of free will —their theories rested upon many different layers of spirituality and supernatural metaphysics, and a critique of any individual component may not be charitable enough.
With this in mind, I will offer a brief exposition of the primary approaches to free will offered by the ancient philosophers and theologians, followed by a brief review of the ancient approaches generally.

The Ancient Greek Philosophers

For the ancient philosophers, few true separations of metaphysics and theology existed. Common to most ancient approaches to determinism and free will is a belief either in teleology or fate—a belief bound up in religious superstition or supernatural powers under unassuming guises, such as a ‘guiding rationality’. In Plato’s case, reference is made to a supernatural ‘reason’ which allows us to act freely. Although Plato makes no reference to a mechanistic universe, and as such is not putting forward this theory specifically to defend free will from determinism, his theory does seek to explain the distinction between the free will seemingly afforded to humans, which is withheld from animals and inanimate objects. Plato argues that actions of passion or instinct are, in a sense, involuntary (Republic, 430d–445e). As animals are ruled exclusively by passions and instincts, or so Plato claims, animals can have no access to free will. This is because he distinguishes between an action of passion (or instinct) and an action borne of rationality. As summarized succinctly by Phillip Cary:

‘Passion is not an action—it is not something we do but something that happens in us. In action, I may simply do what I choose... But in passion, I may simply be moved within myself, whether or not I choose to be: an old man blocks my path, and I just get angry. Unlike the beasts, of course, I can choose what to do with my anger and whether to act on it, based on a rational judgment about what action would be good to take, not just on how I happen to feel’.¹

We can see within the words of Plato, therefore, an approach to free will that does not include determinism whatsoever. With that in mind, Plato’s articulation of free will does not differ too greatly from modern compatibilist arguments. Modern compatibilist arguments defending free will often boil down to an instance of voluntariness—an action that is not brought about by coercion or constraint. Plato’s articulation of free will is not so dissimilar, as he puts forward rationality as a way of escaping from the constraints of passion and instinct.

This consideration of voluntariness and rationality is mirrored in Aristotle, who offered a similar theory of free will. He too considered actions taken rationally to be voluntary in a way that actions of instinct or base desire are not. Further, Aristotle makes a distinction between actions based on instinct or desire and those based on reason. An action based on instinct might be one in which one has a desire, and an action is taken to fulfil that desire; for example, a thirsty man or animal searching for a drink. This same action can be considered rationally, however; a thirsty man may reason that he needs hydration to survive, and goes in search of water. Trivial as this distinction may appear, it is vital to Aristotle’s efforts to distinguish between the actions of humans and those of animals. For Aristotle, an individual is acting freely when they are acting based on rationally developed judgments.

The Stoics

With the advent of stoic philosophy, a new view of the universe began to emerge. Whilst this view of the universe was often placed in language that to us appears supernatural, such as fate or providence, the Stoics were speaking of a mechanistic, determined universe. One such articulation of this mechanism is offered by Cicero:

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2 Ibid., 168
‘Nothing has happened that was not going to be, and likewise nothing is going to be of which nature does not contain causes working to bring that very thing about. [Thus fate is not the fate of superstition], but that of physics, an everlasting cause of things—why past things happened, why present things are now happening, and why future things will be’.

Whether the universe was determined due to cause and effect, or the guidance of a deity, a problem emerged: if the universe we live in is fully determined (or predetermined), wherein can we find free will? After all, if an individual cannot avoid living a certain life, how can he properly claim ownership of it? This charge was levied against the Stoics and Epicureans, as others had questioned how such a theory could account for human action. The Epicureans avoided this charge by introducing randomness into their theory, a randomness not so unlike the quantum randomness used by modern libertarianism. Epicurus argued that individual atoms could, at times, ‘swerve’ off course, away from where they had been determined to go. This randomness offers an opportunity for free will, as an instance of indeterminacy could allow for actions that are free from causality. The specifics of this approach are decidedly vague—is it human free will which caused the atom to swerve, or are our instances of free will up to the whims of the atoms?

The Stoics took a different approach to this problem, instead arguing that the world was fully determined, and no escape from this path was available. However, the Stoics believed that the nature of the universe was not merely mechanistic, but instead followed the path of an almost divine reason. This reason was what brought coherency to the universe, and as a result, all events in the world had a purpose. It is because the mechanisms of the universe are tied to rationality that we are able to gain access to free will. Cary explains that free will is compatible with a deterministic universe because ‘the wisest human choices are rational, and rational choices necessarily

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4 Cary, "A Brief History of the Concept of Free Will," 170
harmonize with the divine reason that governs the universe and foresees its future’. It is unclear how precisely this leads to an instance of free will—are our freely made ‘choices’ mere decisions between the rational or irrational? If that is so, each scenario would present us with only a single rational choice, and we would be unable to be rational and exercise free will simultaneously. Even if we agreed with the premise, and allowed for a universe guided by reason, there is little explanation of how anyone could claim ownership of their actions if acting ‘rationally’ is the path to free will.

Cary goes on to explain that the Stoics were not fatalistic, as they believed that certain chains of events could theoretically be broken by irrational actions. If, for instance, someone determined that they were fated to be virtuous, and thus decided that striving for virtue was unnecessary, they would not become virtuous—this is because the Stoics believed that attaining virtue required certain actions. Put differently, the Stoics did not believe that certain outcomes were completely unavoidable, only that each outcome was mechanistic in how it came to be. The rational outcomes of the universe require human inputs, and it is these rational (and therefore free) inputs that give meaning, and freedom, to our lives. Through this method, we can also continue to claim responsibility for our actions. Even the uncharitable analysis I have presented, which concludes that the only choice we can make is between rationality and irrationality, provides us with a level of freedom. In any given scenario, we can opt to act rationally or irrationally, and that choice is undetermined.

An alternative interpretation is offered by Susanne Bobzien, who argues that while Stoic philosophy did include a theory that looks remarkably similar to modern causal determinism, their theory of fate did not include a ‘chain of causes’ as would be found in modern determinism. She claims that the stoic’s ‘fate’ did include a causality, but it was limited to a relation between two bodies, rather than a chain of causes and

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5 Cary, "A Brief History of the Concept of Free Will," 170
6 Ibid., 171
7 Susanne Bobzien, Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 19
events continuing ad nauseam. In this way, one initiates a cause that led to an effect, yet once the effect has ended, no causal chain would be created. The accusations of incompatibilism from the stoic’s opponents would then be unfounded, as their theory does not necessarily result in a determinism that precludes free will—relations between bodies involve cause and effect, but human free will holds a place between, or apart from, these interactions.

**The Christian Theologians**

Although the philosophers considered so far have had meaningful contributions to considerations of free will, none of them have utilized the term ‘free will’ up until this point. Some of them have been considering freedom itself, as contrasted with being a slave, and others have attempted to compare the decisions made rationally with those made instinctively, or borne from emotion. It is only with the advent of Christian theology that a true consideration of free will emerges. I conceive of two primary reasons that Christian theologians were driven towards the concept of free will. The first consideration is that of God’s qualities; an omnipotent, omniscient god would know all of our actions, and all of our decisions, long before we made them—long before we were even born. Indeed, an all-powerful god may even be accused of ‘programming’ our decisions into us, as that would be well within his power. The second concern is the problem of evil. If true evil and suffering exist in the world, which they do appear to, we must ask where they could have come from. An omnipotent, omnibenevolent, omniscient God would be able to observe evil, desire its removal, and then remove it. Evil still appears to exist, thus presenting the problem.

It is from this starting point that many Christian theologians addressed free will directly, including Saint Augustine, who was perhaps the first scholar to examine free will so closely. Augustine was focused on two problems in particular—the problem of evil, as outlined above, and the problem of predestination, which resembles the problem of God’s qualities, with some significant differences. The problem of evil
earned a rather simple response from Augustine: Our access to free will is the cause of evil. God himself is perfect, and no evil can exist when humans act in accordance with his commands. For mysterious reasons, however, humanity was allowed access to free will, and many individuals find temptation in places apart from God. Cary describes human free will here as a kind of gravitational pull—the more we align our will with certain desires (to be closer to God, to attain material wealth, etc.), the more difficult it becomes to shift our alignment to something else. (Cary, 173) As a result, the man that sins once is more likely to continue sinning, and this increasing propensity to sin is akin to a weakening of his free will. Put differently, we are born with free will, but that capacity for free will slowly fades as we sin. This propensity for sin constitutes the origin of evil, and God’s continued support of our free will allows evil to continue.

One might wonder, at this point, how salvation can be possible for those that have sinned. After all, each sin committed reduces one’s access to free will, and eventually, one would be left with so limited free will that committing oneself to God would be nigh impossible. This problem is further compounded when one considers God’s power of omniscience—If God knows all things, he knows who it is that will choose to believe in him, and who will not. If God has knowledge of these things prior even to a person’s birth, that person is limited to a single possible outcome for their life. If this is true, surely no instance of free will (however that can even be understood) can change the future that God had already perfectly predicted. Augustine considered this problem as well, known as the problem of predestination. He attempts to sidestep this issue by reducing the claim to a more palatable one—that God merely has knowledge of what decisions we will make, and not that he has any influencing power over them. Whilst it is true that God knows what will come to pass, and certain things will come to pass through processes set in place by God, many of God’s premonitions require willing humans. Ilham Dilman explains this process, saying:

‘God knows that we are going to grow old, and who but a madman would deny that we grow old by necessity! God equally knows what we shall will, before we
have willed it. Yet when what He foreknows comes to pass what comes to pass is my willing itself. His foreknowledge of what I shall do does not by-pass my willing it – my agency or authorship. [Augustine] is suggesting that what God knows in advance is what I shall freely choose.\(^8\)

Our free will is supposedly left fully intact—we come upon a dilemma, and we freely make a decision. God happens to know in advance what we will choose, but this is on account of his spectacular predictive abilities, and not an instance of coercion. Although these caveats seem to leave free will intact, Augustine neglected to consider where our desires initially came from. After all, at the moment of creation, God would have been aware of the ways in which humans would act, and he certainly had the power to manipulate the creation in minute ways so as to bring about certain actions by certain people. Either he created us with a particular set of actions in mind for each person at each moment, or he created us with his metaphysical eyes closed, neither of which satisfies a strict interpretation of free will.

Aquinas also addressed the problem of free will, by linking together the concept of free will championed by Aquinas, and the philosophy of Aristotle. Aquinas saw rationality as a key component of free will, in a way not so dissimilar from Aristotle himself. The key difference between Aristotle and Aquinas lies in the claim being made—Aristotle was claiming that actions of rationality constitute free will, as opposed to acts of coercion. Aquinas was making the stronger claim that rationality constitutes a metaphysical free will, a true libertarian free will. Just as we compared the instinct of an animal to the rationality of the human when considering Aristotle, that same comparison demonstrates the ways in which human beings can be free for Aquinas. I argued that the primary issue with the Stoic articulation of free will is that it barely conforms with any kind of free will we might recognise—to argue that ‘rational’ arguments are free leads to some absurd situations. A ‘rational’ decision surely only has one correct outcome—the rational one. This charge also applies to Aquinas.

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\(^8\) Ilham Dilman, *Free Will: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), 82
Rational decisions (and therefore ‘free’ ones for Aquinas) only have a single possible outcome—where, then, can we find free will? Dilman argues that Aquinas leans into this critique, and posits that rational outcomes can be determined for all decisions, even moral quandaries, with only a single rational outcome possible. These conclusions are necessary, so anyone starting from the same premises must draw the same conclusions.

Critiquing the Ancient Approaches

The most striking element of the ancient approaches to free will is how little they contend with determinism. Although I have no doubt that most, if not all, ancient philosophers believed in libertarian free will, the free will debated in the ancient texts was not free will so much as voluntariness. The free will espoused by the ancient thinkers appears as a combination of freedom from external coercion and internal distractions, such as instinct, emotion, ignorance, etc. For these philosophers, we have access to free will when we are acting rationally rather than emotionally, when we are free from outside coercion and are acting in accordance with our desires, and/or when we are acting in alignment to a moral code. These different theories seemingly succeed in contrasting voluntariness with involuntariness, providing a useful framework for considering instances of coercion versus freedom.

It may seem, then, that most of these theories fail to accurately depict free will. To suggest that actions considered rationally constitute free will, in the face of determinism, seems misguided. It is true that these ancient theories are not considering free will as we know it, nor are they truly responding to the challenges facing modern defenders of free will. As a result, perhaps no fair critique of the ancient theories of free will can be offered. These philosophers were considering voluntariness, not free will—any critique from a modern perspective would be destined to result in a strawman. However, it would be short-sighted to argue that the ancient theories are

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9 Dilman, Free Will: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction, 93
irrelevant to modern debates. In fact, we can see in Hobbes’ defence of free will, which I will discuss shortly, the strong influence of these ancient theories on the modern compatibilist tradition. The ability to act free from coercion or base instinct is going to be central to many theories of free will which follow.

**Hobbes**

The philosophers considered above were primarily concerned with when we are and are not acting voluntarily. The problem of free will and determinism is almost entirely absent from their philosophies. I speculate that the reason for this absence is due to an absence of mechanistic or deterministic theories. With the notable exception of Epicurus, no true mechanistic or deterministic philosophers entered mainstream thought—those that did, such as the Stoics, were considering something rather different. The Stoics believed in mechanism, insofar as one event would, like gears in a machine, cause another event to occur. This type of mechanism has few significant ramifications, however. To speak of causality in this abstract way is only to speak of how we already think of the world, pre-philosophically. No theory of mechanism limited in this way is able to create a real threat to free will. What would be required was a continuing mechanism—a mechanism that goes beyond dictating that one action results in another, but that all events are driven by prior events. A type of mechanism that ensures that no events occur in a vacuum, and as such all actions taken are merely the result of prior causal factors.

This creates a problem: If all events are the result of prior causal factors, then all human actions are the result of prior causes. If this is true, and all human actions are the result of prior causal factors (or dictated by God), how can anyone claim ownership over them? One of the first philosophers to examine this problem was Hobbes. Hobbes was a determinist, in that he believed all human actions, including our desires to act in certain ways, were the result of prior causal factors. In an exchange with John Bramhall, Hobbes said:
‘The question is not whether a man be a free agent, that is to say, whether he can write or forbear, speak or be silent, according to his will; but whether the will to write and the will to forbear come upon him according to his will, or according to anything else in his power. I acknowledge this liberty, that I can do if I will, but to say I can will if I will, I take to be an absurd speech’.\textsuperscript{10}

Two key components of this excerpt emerge. The first of these components, taken from the end of the excerpt, is: ‘I acknowledge this liberty, that I can do if I will, \textit{but to say I can will if I will, I take to be an absurd speech’}. Hobbes is quite clearly rejecting the libertarian position—namely, that we can act free from outside influences, that we retain ‘the ability to do otherwise’. In arguing that we cannot will if we will, Hobbes is rejecting free will in the strong sense. Note, however, the second component. Hobbes writes that he acknowledges the liberty of choosing to speak or be silent, write or forbear, etc. In essence, Hobbes is accepting that we have a certain freedom, which is the ability to do as we will. This voluntariness is referenced multiple times throughout his work on free will. The best example is in reference to scripture:

‘“If a wife make a vow, it is left to her husband’s choice either to establish it or make it void.’ For it proves no more but that the husband is a \textit{free and voluntary agent}, but not that his choice is not necessitated or not determined by what he shall choose by precedent necessary causes’.\textsuperscript{11}

More clearly in this passage than others, Hobbes is making a distinction between voluntariness, or ‘freedom’, and the more demanding freedom from necessity. We can see this distinction beginning to emerge, a distinction which will become increasingly important throughout this thesis.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., §6
Voluntariness and Origination

The distinction demonstrated in Hobbes marks the difference between the free will of the compatibilist and the free will of the libertarian. As made clear during my consideration of Hobbes, the freedom that is afforded to his ‘free agents’ is not freedom from necessity, the free will espoused by libertarians. This type of free will would require not merely the ability act as we will, but to choose what we will. Hobbes is instead referring to the limited freedom to act according to your will, in a voluntary manner. Although Hobbes manages to avoid this confusion, modern compatibilists, incompatibilists and libertarians often use the term ‘free will’ interchangeably, each referring to their own radically different concept. Using the term ‘free will’ to refer to both compatibilist and libertarian free will is obscure, confusing, and ultimately misleading. It should be sufficient when one speaks of having access to ‘free will’ that others understand which one is being referred to. Other philosophers have used the cumbersome terms ‘compatibilist free will’ and ‘libertarian free will’ to solve this problem. However, these terms fail to precisely designate what exactly is being referenced, as the compatibilist and libertarian positions may shift.

To that end, I will henceforth refer to the free will of the compatibilist as voluntariness, and the free will of the libertarian as origination. These terms were originally coined by Ted Honderich, and each term more closely references what exactly is being referenced. The term ‘voluntariness’ references instances in which we are acting voluntarily—either because we are acting according to our will, or because we are not constrained, or controlled by animal impulse. The term ‘origination’ references the metaphysical ability to act free from causality, such that we could act without being influenced by external forces, or create new causal chains. As my inclination is to reference origination as free will, as origination more closely mirrors our naïve understanding of free will, I’ll do so within this thesis. However, a large component of the free will debate has been which position (compatibilism or
libertarianism) best deserve the term ‘free will’. This should be kept in mind moving forward.

The move to split the definition of free will into two separate terms (voluntariness and origination) is not without its detractors. Peter Van Inwagen argues that a separation of these terms is either illogical, obtuse, or simply false. He specifically argues that the terms ‘libertarian free will’ and ‘compatibilist free will’ are referring to a single idea: ‘free will’. He bases this argument on some simple claims, yet these claims are offered with little proof and are hardly self-evident.

The first of these is the claim that we are ‘undeniably’ moral agents—that it is ‘undeniable that people do not always behave as they ought’.\(^\text{12}\) He argues for this point by referencing the way that we make moral judgements about others—specifically, the claim that people ‘ought’ to act a certain way. If we lack the ability to do otherwise, which he considers necessary for moral judgements, then ought statements are illogical. He denies the possibility that moral judgements could be inappropriate, instead claiming that ‘denying that agents are ever able to do otherwise is therefore simply not an option’.\(^\text{13}\) Such an argument lacks any rigorous grounding—our moral judgements may well be based on false notions of free will, and would, therefore, need to be abandoned. It is at least conceptually possible that hard incompatibilism is true, and we have no access to any kind of free will whatsoever. In such a world, moral judgements would, in fact, be inappropriate and out of place. It is not self-evident that agents can do otherwise based solely on the fact that we act as though we do, just as centuries of acting as though the world flat made it no less round.

Van Inwagen continues, arguing that the separation of free will into a multitude of categories (libertarian free will, compatibilist free will, etc.) is as absurd as speaking of ‘materialist pain’ (or pain according to the materialists), because materialists,

\(^{12}\) Peter Van Inwagen, "How to Think About the Problem of Free Will," *The Journal of Ethics* 12 (2008), 340
\(^{13}\) Ibid., 340
dualists, and idealists are all using the word ‘pain’ to refer to the same thing.\textsuperscript{14} Not only is this a false equivalency, it isn’t even clearly true. It is altogether possible that a particular materialist conception of pain would be so far removed from the concept used by the dualist that to continue using the same terminology would be too erroneous and misleading to be justified. This may or may not be true in practice, but it is most certainly true for free will debates. The term ‘free will’ does not have a single unified usage that all parties understand. At the very least, the possibility should remain open for a separation of terminology, just as in the example offered.

Finally, van Inwagen provides a hypothetical situation wherein the two terms would be justifiably separated:

‘One might define ‘libertarian free will’ like this:

\[ X \text{ has libertarian free will} = \text{df} X \text{ has free will } simpliciter \text{ and free will } simpliciter \text{ is incompatible with determinism.} \]

Similarly, one might offer this definition of compatibilist free will:

\[ X \text{ has compatibilist free will} = \text{df} X \text{ has free will } simpliciter \text{ and free will } simpliciter \text{ is compatible with determinism.} \textsuperscript{15} \]

However, he contends that neither the libertarians nor the compatibilists are actually arguing using these terms—if this was the case, neither party would be required to offer arguments to demonstrate their own case. Van Inwagen concedes, however, that compatibilists often attempt to refute the arguments of the incompatibilist, rather than putting forward their own, and I would add that the reverse is often equally true.\textsuperscript{16} I find this to be a diversion, however, as the free will debate is often centred around more consequential topics than whether or not we have access to a nebulously defined free will—instead, we often speak to these topics in relation to moral judgements,

\textsuperscript{14} Van Inwagen, "How to Think About the Problem of Free Will," 334
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 337
\textsuperscript{16} Van Inwagen, "How to Think About the Problem of Free Will," 337
personal achievements, the value of our relationships, etc. The compatibilists and incompatibilists are at least as concerned with defending their positions as they are applying their position to the various problems a lack of free will presents. The charge for the compatibilist is to demonstrate that their own somewhat limited version of free will is sufficient to allow us access to the above, whilst the incompatibilist must find a way to reconcile the clear problems their position has with these topics—either finding new ways to achieve them, or rejecting their possibility outright. In all of these cases, however, a separation of terminology is as valid and useful as ever.

This is not to say I have no sympathy for Van Inwagen’s position. The terminology in the free will debate is flawed, yet it may be the case that the reasons presented for separating free will into multiple terms are insufficient. I deny his claim that this is illogical or manifestly flawed, however, and I will separate free will into the terms voluntariness and origination where appropriate with the aim of providing further clarity to often confusing debates.

**Compatibilism**

Philosophers like Hobbes, who argue that free will and determinism can coexist, are called compatibilists.Compatibilists typically argue that voluntariness and determinism can coexist, with an accompanying rejection of the possibility and desirability of origination. There are many differing defences of compatibilism. Of these approaches, I will be examining those of Harry Frankfurt in some detail, in part due to personal preference, and in part due to his position as a rather typical compatibilist philosopher. Frankfurt’s arguments can be reduced to two distinct arguments. The first argument is that moral responsibility does not require the ability to do otherwise, and the second is his articulation of free will, and who does and does not have access to it.
Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility

The first argument, that moral responsibility does not require the ability to do otherwise, is outlined in his article ‘Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility’. Within, Frankfurt argues against a long-standing and tenacious position within the incompatibilist tradition, which he dubs ‘the principle of alternate possibilities’. He defines this principle as the claim that ‘a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise’. He admits that this principle has been particularly convincing for many philosophers, with some even taking it as being an a priori truth. This shouldn’t be particularly surprising—we often absolve people of moral responsibility when we believe that they what they had done was unavoidable in some way, either due to some threat of violence, or some other extenuating circumstances. Frankfurt challenges this belief, with a series of examples involving an agent who cannot do otherwise, and yet seems to retain their moral responsibility. He opens with the claim that:

‘There may be circumstances that constitute sufficient conditions for a certain action to be performed by someone and that therefore make it impossible for the person to do otherwise, but that do not actually impel the person to act or in any way produce this action. A person may do something in circumstances that leave him not alternative to doing it, without these circumstances actually moving him or leading him to do it—without them playing any role, indeed, in bringing it about that he does what he does.’

Frankfurt’s initial example works to demonstrate that such a scenario as the one outlined above is altogether possible, and that such a scenario would, in fact, leave

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18 Ibid., 186
moral responsibility intact. He asks us to consider the subject Jones. Jones decides for reasons of his own to do something, and then someone threatens him with a harsh penalty, to ensure that he follows through with what he had already previously decided. It is possible, Frankfurt writes, that Jones may be an unreasonable man, and no threat to his person can convince him to do anything. In this case, the threat is meaningless to him, and as such he acts the way he does not because of the threat, but because of what he had already decided. In such a case, it seems pretty clear that the threat was insufficient in reducing his moral responsibility. Another possibility is that Jones is a cowardly man, and any threat would be sufficient to make him do whatever he was commanded, completely forgetting whatever he had previously planned to do. In this case, he cannot be considered morally responsible, according to Frankfurt, as the action was purely a result of the coercion, regardless of the earlier decision he had made. The third and most interesting case is that Jones neither ignored the threat nor was he overwhelmed by it. He had already decided to take the action he was threatened to take, and it was upon this basis that he acted. If he had otherwise been liable to change his mind, however, the threat would have prevented him from changing his action. In this case, Frankfurt argues that although Jones could not have acted otherwise, prevented from acting differently due to the threat, the threat was not the reason that he acted, and as such moral responsibility is retained.

Frankfurt offers a secondary example to drive home his point, one involving a dedicated individual, named Black, that works to ensure that Jones follows through on his decision. Unlike the example involving the threat, however, Black wants to avoid interfering unless he is required to. In this example, we can imagine Jones deciding to act, and then acting without any interference from Black. Jones acted free from coercion (as he was not threatened) and according to his own desires. He is unaware of the fact that he could not have done otherwise, as Black would have intervened and forced Jones to act. In this instance, it seems odd to claim that Jones is not morally responsible, as Black’s presence is never a factor in Jones’ decision-making. This

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example, however, is an instance in which Jones could not have done otherwise, the principle which we had previously assumed removed moral responsibility. Frankfurt recognises that the situation would be different if, for example, Jones had decided not to act and then Black intervened. However, if he acts without input from Black, the fact that Black could have intervened is irrelevant for moral responsibility.

Frankfurt makes two primary claims following from this argument. The first is that the principle of alternate possibilities is false, as the fact that one could not do otherwise is insufficient to absolve them of moral responsibility. The second is his proposal for a revised principle of alternate possibilities: ‘a person is not morally responsible for what he has done if he did it only because he could not have done otherwise’. He believes that such an articulation avoids an incompatibilist conclusion, as this principle still allows for moral responsibility when one cannot do otherwise, so long as that is not the only reason for action.

I take no issue with his first conclusion—I accept that the principle of alternate possibilities is false, as his examples effectively demonstrate. I also tentatively accept the second principle, in that such a rule seems effective in determining whether one was or was not responsible in his examples. However, Frankfurt’s articulation of moral responsibility fails to provide a solution to the problem of determinism. Recall the second ‘Jones’ example, the one in which Jones desires to act, but in the event that he decided not to act, another force would intervene to ensure that he did act. Frankfurt elaborates with more outlandish examples in an attempt to demonstrate the possibilities of his example. In these alternate versions, Black manipulates Jones not through a threat, but instead uses a potion, or hypnotizes him, or manipulates his brain in such a way that ensures that he chooses as Black desires—the role of Black can even be played by an impartial machine, or even by a natural force akin to gravity. Yet none of these examples is capable of filling the role of determinism.

20 Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility," 191
Although Frankfurt’s examples seem to prove his point, they only further demonstrate the split between compatibilist and libertarian free will—between voluntariness and origination. Every example offered by Frankfurt can be reduced to instances in which either Jones is responsible for his actions, or another agent (or machine, or natural force) is to blame. Put differently, there are some situations where the reason for Jones’ decision rests within Jones and some where the reason rests within an external causal factor. Although Frankfurt claims that the test for moral responsibility should be that ‘one is not morally responsible for one’s actions if they did it only because they could not have done otherwise’, the result of this amendment would be that Jones never has moral responsibility.

His decision to act can be perfectly free of obvious, overt coercion (or potions, or hypnosis), yet his decision would still come from external factors, such as environment and genetics, factors that Jones has an equally low amount of control over. Jones is bound just as much by the factors he can see as those he cannot—if determinism is true, it seems peculiar to draw a distinction between visible and invisible influences. If we apply Frankfurt’s test for moral responsibility to his examples, and we assume determinism is true, none of his examples allow access to moral responsibility, as Jones is never acting free from coercion. Frankfurt would argue that moral responsibility is available when viewed through the lens of voluntariness and origination. Frankfurt sees the origin of Jones’ decision to act as more or less irrelevant—that is, he rejects the value of origination when it comes to decision-making. The element that Frankfurt considers vital is instead whether or not the action Jones took was voluntary. Insofar as we are considering voluntariness as the test for moral responsibility, we can come to the same conclusions as Frankfurt when we consider which examples allow Jones moral responsibility, and which absolve him of it. In any example that Jones is acting voluntarily, without coercion or mind control, Frankfurt assigns him moral responsibility. Any situation that results in his losing his voluntariness also takes away his moral responsibility.
Can We Be Determined and Free?

In a separate article, Frankfurt offers his own articulation of free will, as well as who does and does not have access to it. This article, titled ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person’, explains what Frankfurt considers to be the requirements for free will. He argues that people have different levels of desire—higher level desires, such as wanting to eat or drink, and lower (or deeper) desires, which tend to be broader in scope, such as wanting to be a certain kind of person, or live a certain way. The specifics of his theory aren’t really relevant here—what is relevant is his insistence that his theory is able to coexist with a theory of determinism. He writes: ‘it seems conceivable that it should be causally determined that a person is free to want what he wants to want. If this is conceivable, then it might be causally determined that a person enjoys a free will’.21

Frankfurt’s claim here can be taken one of two ways—either Frankfurt has a warped understanding of determinism, or he is referencing voluntariness when he speaks of free will. It is altogether possible that Frankfurt is claiming, when he says that someone could be causally determined to ‘want what they want’, that a person has essentially won the metaphysical lottery, and been blessed enough to desire through determinism what they would have desired had determinism been false. In that way, they are causally determined to want what they want. If this is true, however, then Frankfurt would be bound to the bizarre claim that some people are not free to want what they want—that some people would want certain things, yet determinism ‘forces’ them to want something else. This scenario, strange as it sounds, isn’t so dissimilar to his ‘Jones’ examples. We can imagine Jones not wanting to act, and the spectre of determinism driving him to want to act. The issue with this example is that determinism is no ghost driving us towards certain outcomes, sometimes without our consent. The fact that Jones wanted to act is always due to determinism—his desires can come from no other place than causal factors. To suggest that some people have

21 Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," 211
desires which line up with how they are determined to be is to say nothing at all.

This may be an unnecessarily harsh reading of Frankfurt, as a more likely
candidate is available—we can assume that when he refers to ‘free will’, he is really
referring to voluntariness. Thus, when he writes that ‘it might be causally determined
that a person enjoys a free will’, he is speaking of our ability to act voluntarily. Some
agents would be causally determined to be able to act voluntarily, and others would
not be able to act voluntarily, such as unwilling drug addicts, or those being coerced to
act by others. Under this reading, Frankfurt’s articulation of free will is completely
compatible with determinism, as he says. This kind of claim has little actual
consequence, however. To argue merely that some people will be unwilling addicts,
and others will be willing addicts, has little bearing on an argument regarding
determinism.
Chapter 2 – Reconsidering the Harms of Determinism

My task for this thesis is to demonstrate a clear path to affirmation—a way of accommodating ourselves to our lack of free will, taking solace in the things we have left, and the things we stand to gain. One obstacle to accomplishing this goal is the myriad harms supposedly wrought on us if we believe we have no free will. Many philosophers throughout history have spoken with dread about the consequences of losing our access to free will (whatever form that lost free will might take). I will specifically be examining the issues brought up by Smilansky, considered with responses by other contemporary philosophers of free will, including Pereboom and Honderich. In general, positions in support of free will belief are often grounded in misconceptions about the value of free will.

The problems supposedly raised by determinism tend primarily to be of two kinds. The first is a question about ourselves, and whether our achievements are valid if determinism is true. The second question is typically one of moral responsibility. In fact, many modern philosophers of free will including Caruso22, Van Inwagen23, G. Strawson24 and others have suggested that the problem of free will and determinism is primarily a question of moral responsibility, with free will itself simply signifying the capacity for moral responsibility. In both cases, I will utilize the distinction between voluntariness and origination to argue that in these cases, the important aspects of achievement and moral responsibility persist, when viewed through the lens of voluntariness. Honderich identifies a possible third area threatened by determinism—our life-hopes.

The problem of determinism here is the question of what remains of ourselves when our free will is lost. Our achievements, our guilt and repentance, and our hopes

23 Van Inwagen, "How to Think About the Problem of Free Will," 328
for the future—if we are to achieve affirmation regarding determinism, we must be able to find meaningful ways to maintain or adapt these elements of our lives.

Moral Praise

To demonstrate the typical articulation of the problem of moral praise (and moral responsibility in general), let us briefly examine Galen Strawson’s ‘basic argument’. The argument is as follows:

1. Nothing can be causa sui – nothing can be the cause of itself.
2. In order to be truly or ultimately morally responsible for one’s actions one would have to be causa sui, at least in certain crucial mental respects.
3. Therefore no one can be truly or ultimately morally responsible.²⁵

We could draw some initial, worrying conclusions here. For instance, one might conclude that the loss of ultimate moral responsibility would mean that nobody would be deserving of moral praise or blame. However, this implication is overstated.

We can imagine hearing about a charitable and kind woman, that gives consistently to responsible charities, and volunteers regularly for local community groups. She is kind to others, and never indulges in cruelty or selfishness. We typically consider such a person to be praiseworthy, which is based on a few key factors. One of these factors, and perhaps the most obvious, is that she could have chosen to act differently. Each time she gives to charity, she could have instead kept the money for herself; each time she acted with kindness, she could have acted with greed, or envy, or some other less praiseworthy response. We commend people when they act in these positive ways because they made the decision to put the happiness of others before their own (or some similar decision). We also find her actions praiseworthy, because they resulted in a certain suffering or sacrifice for her, with a related boon for

²⁵ Strawson, "The Impossibility of Ultimate Responsibility?,” 41
others. Each time she gives her own money to others, she is worse off, so that others can be better off. We wouldn’t consider a donation of a few hundred dollars to be especially praiseworthy if she were a billionaire, as no real sacrifice was made, nor would we especially praise her time volunteering if she was making no actual sacrifice to do so. If an action results in positive outcomes but has no associated sacrifices, it would often not qualify as morally praiseworthy—we might consider such actions morally obligatory, or simply polite or kind.

In short, it seems that we respect morally praiseworthy behaviour in part because of the intentions behind them, and in part because of the sacrifices inherent in them. With this in mind, we can analyse what harms are wrought by determinism. We cannot rightfully praise good intentions, as nobody can take credit for that kind of content. However, we additionally consider actions praiseworthy because of the sacrifices inherent in them. Although the kindly woman may not have freely chosen to make sacrifices for others, she is still that one that suffered for others. As such, we can praise her on account of the pains she endured, even if we cannot praise her good intentions.

If determinism poses a threat to the value of our moral achievements, that threat is surely only to a certain portion of our views about achievement—the parts involving intention, or dedication, or personality. Smilansky disagrees, arguing that moral achievements have little value in a world without free will, as even the actions of moral exemplars are simply an unfolding of what happens to be.\(^\text{26}\) He argues that true appreciation of moral achievement is impossible if the actions taken are merely the result of determined sequences. It is unclear to me, however, how this can be the case. The example of the charitable woman offered above can be the test case for Smilansky’s argument. If the charitable woman lacks free will, he argues that her actions will be undeserving of (or simply will not receive) true appreciation. I concede

that some element of appreciation is lost. If he is arguing, however, that the actions of the moral exemplar lose their praiseworthiness altogether, his argument fails. Recall that the praiseworthiness of the charitable woman comes only in part from her freely willing the sacrifices—the other portion comes from the sacrifices themselves. It would be absurd to claim that the charitable woman is no longer deserving of any praise if her actions came from causal factors rather than a free will—the woman still suffered so as to bring about desirable outcomes for others.

The second element of Smilansky’s critique is his claim that ‘all people—whatever their efforts and sacrifices—are morally equal: i.e. there cannot be any means of generating ‘real’ moral value’. This is true in the abstract—if we have no moral responsibility without free will, then moral exemplars cannot exist. This does not mean, however, that there cannot be actions that are considered good or bad within a society, even a society that rejects free will. Consider the following example:

A small town lives in the shadow of a very large, very steep mountain. One day, a minor earthquake creates a crack in the mountain, and a rockslide tumbles down the mountain, crushing nearly half of the town. The remaining townspeople can speak of the rockslide as being ‘bad’—they would have preferred that it hadn’t happened. They can also point out certain causal factors, such as the earthquake, and the mountain’s shape, and their own proximity to it. It may not make much sense to assign moral blame to the earthquake, as though the earthquake could have opted not to exist, yet the statement ‘I would have preferred that the earthquake not cause the rockslide’ is perfectly valid.

We can consider an alternative version of events—the earthquake occurs, cracks the side of the mountain, and causes the rockslide. In this version of events, however, the rockslide lands harmlessly beside the town, and the crack in the side of the mountain reveals a rich deposit of gold, which the town uses to become fabulously wealthy. Again, the townspeople can speak of the rockslide being ‘good’, as they prefer this state of affairs to one where it didn’t happen. Furthermore, they can attribute the

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27 Smilansky, "Free Will: From Nature to Illusion," 86
rockslide to the earthquake, and be glad that the earthquake occurred. They cannot reasonably assign moral praise to the earthquake, but they can make the claim ‘I am glad that the earthquake caused the rockslide.’

Finally, we can put aside the earthquake and the rockslide, and instead imagine a plucky young explorer, who through his own valiant efforts finds the rich gold deposit, and offers its location to the town without demanding a reward. Again, the townspeople can speak of his actions as good, as they reference a preferable state of affairs. Furthermore, they can attribute the finding of the gold deposit to the explorer, and be glad that the explorer was around. If determinism is true, the explorer is not morally responsible for his actions, but they can make the claim ‘I am glad that the explorer told us about the gold deposit’. Does this final example constitute an instance of the explorer generating real moral value? It does not, and if the explorer had free will, it might have. However, Smilansky was talking about the problem of appreciation—of attributing moral praise to others. Is an expression of gladness or joy not sufficiently akin to an expression of moral praise that they could not perform similar roles within society? Even if it cannot, I would think that a person’s expression of gladness or joy would be preferable to an expression of admiration, as it has more relation to the actual services rendered and sacrifices made. In either case, the practical response to actions considered to be morally praiseworthy would surely be more or less the same. It is true, as Smilansky has claimed, that no agents are capable of generating ‘real’ moral value. That would require moral responsibility, which we lack. That fact alone, however, is of little consequence. The examples above serve to demonstrate that we can still praise actions without relying on free will.

**Guilt**

If we are to accept that determinism is true, we may persist in actions and attitudes of praise, although this praise would only be directed at actions, not thoughts. If our actions of praise would be weaker, is it equally true that others should feel less
shame or guilt when they perform morally blameworthy actions? Smilansky argues that being aware of one’s lack of free will might work to absolve someone of their past bad deeds—and with no guilt or regret for immoral actions or mistakes, we have no motivation to improve. He writes that ‘her life, her decisions, that which is most truly her own, appear to be accidental phenomena of which she is the mere vehicle, and to feel moral remorse for any of it, by way of truly owning up to it, seems in some deep sense to be misguided’.28 If we do not take responsibility for our actions, as demonstrated by feeling remorse for them, we can act as though morality does not apply to us, or without any concern for ramifications—after all, if we cannot be responsible for our actions, then we are also not responsible for any consequences.

Such a claim is overly pessimistic. Much as in our discussion of moral praise, there may be outliers whose basis for acting morally is centred exclusively on their ability to feel remorse. Yet the majority of us do not act morally simply because we could be blamed if we didn’t. Pereboom suggested that the basis for guilt is not focused exclusively on oneself, but instead in witnessing the effects of your actions. He asks the reader to consider someone behaving badly within the context of a relationship.29 If the person behaving badly is a free will sceptic, they can reject the claim that they are blameworthy in the basic desert sense. However, they are still capable of recognising that they have behaved badly, and can feel deep sorrow and regret for what they had done. He continues, arguing that such feelings might be brought on by experiencing the consequences of your actions—an upset loved one, for instance. It does not require one to feel fully morally responsible for an action for them to wish that they hadn’t done it. Such a desire does not constitute regret proper, but the desire to act differently in the future is still possible, contrary to Smilansky’s argument.

Perhaps Smilansky is correct in suggesting that, for some individuals, freedom from guilt would constitute a free pass to act however they want. I doubt, however,  

28 Smilansky, "Free Will: From Nature to Illusion," 86
29 Michael McKenna and Derk Pereboom, Free Will: A Contemporary Introduction (London: Routledge, 2016), 283
what many people are motivated exclusively by their internal feelings of guilt or pride, ignoring the effects their actions have on others. The kinds of people that can treat others cruelly with the excuse that they couldn’t have done otherwise are probably the kinds of people that would have just as easily used any other kind of excuse. After all, is it not other’s feelings of joy when we do good, and their feelings of anger or sadness when we act poorly, that motivates us to act well?

Furthermore, it is not clear that maintaining guilt is overall positive, even if we accept Smilansky’s claims. There are clear negative aspects to guilt, including the capacity for self-loathing, or a crippling inability to make decisions, as one fears they might come to regret them. If Smilansky is correct in asserting that guilt is a requirement for good behaviour and moral improvement, he still needs to provide a convincing argument that the negative aspects of guilt don’t outweigh the positives. Even if our behaviour was to suffer somewhat without guilt to keep us in line (which I find unlikely), the loss of guilt would not be exclusively negative.

The Value of Moral Responsibility

Debates over determinism and free will have typically centred on the topic of moral responsibility, almost to the exclusion of all other topics. Galen Strawson claimed that it was a matter of historical fact that moral responsibility has been the main focus of discussion on the issue of free will.30 Typically, this discussion takes the form of a critique of the determinist position, arguing that widespread belief in determinism would undermine moral responsibility. The assumption being made, of course, is that moral responsibility is a good thing. Although this position may appear intuitive, Bruce Waller argues that proponents of moral responsibility presuppose the existence of moral responsibility, as a defence of its existence and desirability.31 When our worldview rests on a foundation of moral responsibility, it should come as no surprise

that some elements of it collapse when we take the foundation away. However, the mere fact that moral responsibility is important to us does not justify its continued existence. Of the myriad reasons offered for why moral responsibility is good or useful, I’ll focus on two primary defences of moral responsibility: First, that moral responsibility forms the backbone of society, and second, that moral responsibility is intrinsically important to us.

Do we need moral responsibility to ensure people act well? Both Smilansky and Dennett have argued that moral responsibility maintains order in society, such that taking it away would have disastrous consequences. Smilansky argued that belief in free will allowed us to persist with the concept of ‘justice’, which he equates almost exclusively with punishment. If even some of us became convinced that we lacked moral responsibility, this small group might become ‘cynical or doubtful about the moral difference between the guilty and the innocent’. This is not only because we might lose our reason to continue to punish those that perform badly, but because we have equal moral justification for punishing the ‘innocent’ as we do the ‘guilty’. This constitutes a grave threat for Smilansky, writing that ‘the worst thing one could do would be to point out that, ultimately, none of this makes sense – because the ‘guilty’ are, ultimately, no more guilty than others’.

This can hardly be considered a defence of moral responsibility or free will belief. His argument is analogous to arguing that slave owners should not be informed about the immortality of their actions, else they realise that ‘ultimately, none of this makes sense’. A harsh reading of Smilansky might conclude that his defence of moral responsibility is needlessly cruel to those currently receiving punishment, as his position does not even allow us real moral responsibility, but merely its illusion—and without real moral responsibility, any punishment lacks justification. With this reading, we can see his account as justifying the punishment of innocents so as to maintain the status quo.

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32 Smilansky, "Free Will: From Nature to Illusion," 81
33 Ibid., 84
One could attempt a more charitable reading of Smilansky, which follows closely the arguments by Dennett in support of moral responsibility. Dennett argued not that moral responsibility was itself good or bad, but instead that our society required belief in moral responsibility to function. The positive aspects of moral responsibility were not to be found in its capacity for retribution and punishment, but in its capacity to build societies. Specifically, he argued that we have devised a way to harness these retributive desires, ‘in order to secure something very valuable: a secure and civil society in which people are held responsible for their promises and the other deeds they do “of their own free will” ’. Despite his concession that the current criminal justice system is overzealous with its level of punishment, he believes that belief in moral responsibility plays an important role in allowing us to have trustworthy interactions with others. Specifically, he points to the role of contracts and agreements. Belief in moral responsibility, and its associated belief in punishment and the like, allows us to enter into trustworthy contracts, in part because we understand that if the other party breaks them, we can punish them. This kind of contractual relationship extends beyond specific instances and into the rule of law. This account of moral responsibility is not retributive in his eyes, but consequentialist. He argues from this point that the value of moral responsibility is not in whether or not its existence is justified vis-à-vis free will and determinism, but instead whether or not it is valuable for society. Any attempt to tear down moral responsibility would not only need to justify its removal on philosophical grounds but also provide a practical replacement, such that human society can continue.

The problem with Dennett’s argument is that it rests on one of two implicit assumptions. The first is the belief that modern society is beyond improvement. If Dennett intends to argue this point, he must live a wonderful life indeed. The mere existence of crime should be sufficient to demonstrate that modern society is not

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34 Daniel Dennett, "Dennett Review of "Against Moral Responsibility",
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
perfect, else no-one would have any reason to commit crimes. Furthermore, as per his own concession, our implementation of moral responsibility is often overzealous in the punishment of criminals. I must assume, then, that Dennett is working from a different assumption: that the creation of a brand-new society, which does not require moral responsibility to function, is a fool’s errand. Such a task would be gargantuan in its scope, and impossible to implement. Indeed, his criticism of Waller is that Waller fails to provide an alternative framework for society, which Dennett sees as a requirement for a critique of moral responsibility.37

If my articulation of Dennett is accurate, he is attributing to mine and Waller’s position a revolutionary bent, a desire to overthrow society at large. Instead, the problem of moral responsibility is its capacity to justify harm against other individuals that cannot be deserving of it. The only change to society that a rejection of moral responsibility requires is the prevention of all harms to others, where possible. Dennett argues that the enforcement of law requires the capacity to punish—but how can this be true? Must we place criminals in solitary confinement, or kill them, to enforce the law? There are non-punitive approaches to criminal behaviours, such as the quarantine model proposed by Pereboom and Caruso.

Further to this point, Dennett’s fixation on retribution to ensure adherence to the law fails to recognise the myriad reasons why people commit crimes. Punishment is clearly not a perfect solution to the problem of crime, as crimes still occur. Belief in moral responsibility allows us to justify an ignorance of the plight of criminals. Waller argues that this is due in part to the effectiveness, however limited, of punishment and reward for manipulating behaviour.38 The main problem with maintaining belief in moral responsibility is ‘that we need not look too closely, that we not scrutinize the details of an individual’s causal and environmental history, and that we ignore significant differences in ability and capacities’.39

37 Dennett, "Dennett Review of "Against Moral Responsibility""
38 Waller, Against Moral Responsibility, 137
39 Ibid., 138
It would be difficult to cast aside moral responsibility. It would require us to look beyond actions and towards reasons, such that we can attempt to prevent poor behaviour and promote good behaviour in the future. We would not be able to fall back on ineffectual and cruel punishments. This is also the advantage of rejecting moral responsibility. The task may be more difficult, but it is more humane. When we deny the existence of moral responsibility, we can begin the task of finding new, kinder ways to promote good behaviour—methods that are focused more on the task of preventing poor behaviour, and less on needless and cruel retribution.

Honderich on Life-Hopes

According to Honderich, the greatest harm wrought by determinism is the harm to our life-hopes. As he explains, ‘hopes for large things can be given the name of life-hopes. Such a hope gives to an individual’s life a good deal of its inside nature’.40 These life hopes can be of a grand kind, such as wanting to be a famous musician or being fabulously wealthy. Other life hopes can be more mundane, such as wanting to be secure in one’s job, or as unlucky a hope as merely having enough to eat.41 Not all people’s life hopes are so strictly defined, of course—Honderich suggests that someone’s life hope may simply be for life to turn out well.42

In any case, a person’s life-hopes make up a central component of their lives. Of these life hopes, there are two different kinds. The first kind of life-hopes has to do not just with wanting things, but having achieved them. This is not merely a preoccupation with wanting to have one’s achievements celebrated, but is instead a deeper belief that our achievements will come about due to our own actions. For example, someone might desire to be especially successful at their work not merely because they desire the success itself, but also because they want to have earned that success.

41 Ibid., 91
42 Ibid., 91
Furthermore, this success should not be the result of mere circumstances. It might be the case that someone is born remarkably clever. Considering this first type of life-hopes, such a person might desire to be successful not merely on account of his intelligence, which he can take no real credit for, but on account of his effort and time spent—in short, he wants to be truly responsible for his achievements. Achieving things merely as a result of fortunate circumstances will not satisfy this first kind of life-hope.

It should be clear here what the harm of determinism is. Determinism ensures precisely what the second example sought to avoid—if determinism is true, all successes are merely the result of fortunate circumstances. Furthermore, the fixed nature of the future means that some successes are impossible for us. One’s hope to become a certain kind of person, or be successful in a certain kind of way, may be impossible—and even if one did succeed, they would not be able to take real credit for that success. Honderich asks us to consider what it would be like to internalize this kind of realisation. If we were to fully accept determinism, and consider determinism in relation to the above desires, he claims that the response would almost certainly be dismay.43 This is because those kinds of life-hopes are impossible under determinism.

We also have a second kind of life-hope. These life hopes involve wanting life to turn out a certain kind of way. Honderich’s example is a man that wants to be secure in his job.44 He isn’t necessarily hoping to be successful, or to make certain achievements—he simply desires to work. Similar desires might be broad hopes, such as to be happy, or to own certain things, or to live a certain kind of way. These kinds of desires can still be fulfilled if determinism is true—if the man that desired work is able to find work, then his life hope has been satisfied. If we fully accept determinism, and connect it with this kind of life hope, we can be sure that the two are perfectly compatible. In addition, Honderich claims that we might be able to see that the other kind of life-hopes, those tied to achievement, are incompatible with determinism, but

43 Honderich, How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem, 95
44 Ibid., 96
are perhaps unimportant or vestigial, and can be cast aside. Honderich calls this kind of response *intransigence*.\footnote{Honderich, *How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem*, 97} The intransigent approach rests on the feeling that determinism mostly leaves our lives untouched.

Honderich isn’t claiming here that people can be separated into two distinct categories, based on which types of life-hopes they have. In fact, Honderich argues that all of us have life hopes of the first kind, the kind that are harmed by determinism. He attempts to prove this fact via an argument similar to that of Hobbes: ‘Does anyone really doubt having or being able to have this kind of very natural hope? If so, they can stop doubting by contemplating what it would be like really not to have it’.\footnote{Ibid., 94}

By the end of Honderich’s work here, we are left with two responses to the truth of determinism. The first of these is dismay. We can lament the supposed loss of moral responsibility and praise, and the loss of our life-hopes. The second possible response is intransigence. We can assert that many of our current beliefs are still compatible with determinism, they just require some changes, perhaps of the sort I have outlined here. Although some of our life-hopes are harmed, the majority can persist.

**Double’s Critique of Honderich**

One robust objection to Honderich’s theory is offered by Richard Double. He articulates Honderich’s position as being similar to an attitude scale. On one side, we have an individual that only sees value in origination with voluntariness—on the other, an individual with value only in voluntariness. Honderich claims that all individuals fall somewhere in the middle of this scale,\footnote{Ibid., 114} and this might explain why the debate between the compatibilists and incompatibilists has continued for so long—both positions have been arguing that their preferred kind of value (voluntariness or
origination) is the only value that matters.\textsuperscript{48} Recognising that both positions are valuable to us might allow us to think more clearly about these issues. Double disagrees, arguing that Honderich is mischaracterizing the position of the compatibilist. He describes Honderich as claiming that ‘the free will problem is primarily the issue of deciding which attitudinal response we should make to the hypothesis of determinism’.\textsuperscript{49} If this is true, we have access not only to the response of the incompatibilist, or someone in the middle (the kind of person Honderich suggests we are), but also to the response of compatibilism. Double clarifies that he isn’t talking about a kind of sheepish compatibilism, one that sees the loss of origination as somewhat problematic, and as such rejects the ideals of the libertarian as incompatible with determinism. Instead, he makes reference to the \textit{strident compatibilist}, someone that rejects entirely any value that origination might hold. The strident compatibilist argues that we still have full moral responsibility and that our lives are exactly the same whether or not determinism is true. Therefore, determinism has no consequences, and there is no risk of dismay. This individual also avoids the response of intransigence—indeed, this person has no feelings regarding determinism at all.

What we have at this point are three possible responses to determinism: dismay, intransigence, and a strong form of compatibilism. The first two feelings are appropriate on account of the harms that determinism brings to bear on us, and the strident compatibilist believes that none of the issues raised above are in fact issues at all. The truth of determinism is at worst a dark spectre, and at best a neutral event.

\textsuperscript{48} Honderich, \textit{How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem}, 120
\textsuperscript{49} Richard Double, "Honderich on the Consequences of Determinism," \textit{Philosophy and Phenomenological Research} 56 (1996), 851
Chapter 3 – The Path to Affirmation

In the previous chapter, I responded to some common claims regarding the harms of determinism, so as to demonstrate that losing access to free will is not especially harmful. The previous chapter aimed to inoculate us against dismay. Without further work, however, we would be stuck in a state of intransigence—neither better off nor worse without free will, much like the strident compatibilist. I believe we can go further than this, however. Honderich suggested a third response, alongside the responses of dismay and intransigence—this third response is affirmation. The response of affirmation goes beyond the ‘sad’ response of dismay and the ‘tough’ response of intransigence, into a more hopeful, or calmer, or perhaps more joyous response to the truth of determinism. Achieving affirmation will be difficult, however—Honderich holds little hope that affirmation was even possible. Despite this pessimism, Honderich outlines a dozen or so methods by which to achieve affirmation. These approaches include affirming our remaining life hopes, trading away negatives, connecting with nature, and truly believing in determinism.

These different starting concepts will form the groundwork for my discussion of affirmation. First, I will look at Honderich’s concept of life hopes, and argue that in practice all our life-hopes remain intact under determinism. Then, I will look at what negative aspects of free will belief we will be able to lose, including hatred and guilt. Next, I will look at what positives we can gain via belief in determinism. I will specifically look at meditation as a possible positive action that is improved through belief in determinism. I will then look at how we might come to truly believe in determinism, through a series of practical exercises and thought experiments. I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of how true belief in determinism might prove beneficial not only for an individual, but for society at large, with a specific focus on criminal justice. These different approaches to affirmation may appear fragmented, but

I believe that a holistic approach to the problem of affirmation is required—we must understand that we have little to lose, and a lot to gain.

**Life-Hopes**

The greatest harm of determinism, at least as far as Honderich is concerned, is the threat to our life-hopes. Of these life-hopes, there are two different kinds—those that involve achievement, or being truly responsible for what you do, and the hope that life turns out a certain way. The first kind of life hopes, as discussed previously, are the kind that rely on us being the originators of our actions. These are the kinds of desires found not merely in the desire to succeed, but to have earnt that success—to be a certain kind of person not merely through birth, but through true devotion or dedication. These kinds of life-hopes tend to be particularly inward-looking in their content, as they are concerned primarily with what we can take credit for.\(^{51}\) Honderich argues that all of us have these kinds of life-hopes—or at least, we are all capable of having them. Although many of us may not currently have any life hopes of this kind, Honderich claims that we are likely to oscillate between these different kinds of life hopes, such that we may have them in the future.\(^{52}\) Due to this variability, he claims that we are at times likely to swing between the responses of dismay and intransigence, which is an untenable situation.

**Achievement-Centric Life-Hopes**

The first kind of life hopes, as articulated above, appear to rest on a certain conception of ourselves as capable of achievement, or deserving of praise and blame.

\(^{51}\) I am not suggesting that these kinds of life hopes belong to arrogant or proud people. Surely even the most humble, introverted character would rather they had achieved their own successes, rather than simply received them through luck. That said, a fixation on this kind of selfish achievement would be symptomatic of the problems free will belief can bring.

\(^{52}\) Honderich, *How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem*, 124
Honderich argues that these types of life-hopes involve achievements or outcomes that are not merely the by-products of our character or biology, nor resulting from external factors beyond our control. This articulation leaves much to be desired, however. I fail to see a scenario where an achievement can be merely the result of our character, or some other ‘random’ factor. We could consider natural beauty or inherited wealth as examples of this kind, yet to do so would be false; we cannot have life hopes regarding outcomes that are guaranteed, nor can we consider natural beauty an ‘achievement’.

One might have preferred that they had earned the things they have, rather than simply attained them naturally, yet these backwards-looking feelings cannot be rightly considered life-hopes, but rather the desire that their circumstances had been different. The only meaningful context for these kinds of life-hopes are those that involve being truly responsible for our achievements, such that we could be praised (or blamed) for them. If this is the case, one must ask: why do we praise people at all?

Much like in my examination of moral responsibility and moral praise, I will separate praise in general into two distinct types. Consider an Olympic sprinter. Nobody is born naturally fast enough to compete in the Olympics—for someone to be successful, they must train relentlessly, with great dedication and focus. When we find the sprinter to be praiseworthy it seems that, similar to the moral achievement case, two key components of praise arise. We can find the sprinters dedication to their work praiseworthy. The sprinter might have made sacrifices, endured hardship, chosen to push themselves and their body to its limits, all in pursuit of a goal society considers admirable. The other component of our respect is the achievements themselves. Their fitness, the pains they had endured, the time they had committed, their speed during events—those things hold value regardless of the sprinter’s intentions. Even if the sprinter had been a slave, or had been coerced, or was overall a contemptible person, we could still respect the physical achievement, the intensity or quality of their actions themselves. Whether or not we have free will, the achievements of the Olympian are still deserving of praise.

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53 Honderich, How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem, 93
One might object that the Olympian’s achievements are merely the result of biology and fortunate circumstances, yet this is clearly false, as the Olympian trained relentlessly and endured physically strenuous ordeals to achieve their goal. Their achievements are not merely a by-product of their luck, nor can we claim that the Olympian’s natural fitness (and advantages that follow) denies them praise, although we might have considered them especially praiseworthy if they had not been born especially healthy or fit. Another possible objection is that the Olympian was destined to succeed from birth, and their achievements are not fully the result of their actions. Such a claim is absurd on two counts—the objection fails insofar as it claims that actions taken without the guidance of free will are somehow actions that cannot be credited to us, as though we did not physically undertake them, with the associated pain or pleasure. Furthermore, the possibility of failure is often irrelevant when we assign praise; many experiences in life, such as giving birth or building one’s own house are not praised because they seriously risk failure. We praise these kinds of achievements because of the exertion or ingenuity required. Concerning this kind of life-hopes specifically, one could argue that certain elements of achievement, specifically those elements related to thoughts and intentions, are destroyed if we lack free will. The fact that an individual possesses tenacity or determination is as irrelevant in the assigning of praise for natural beauty or inherited wealth, and so we must deny these as praiseworthy. However, we should re-examine the case of the Olympian slaves or those coerced into competing. These Olympians lack free will regardless of whether we believe free will exists—they have no choice but to train and compete. Are their achievements less praiseworthy than the Olympian that freely chose to compete? I find the two achievements to be mostly analogous.

My position is not that we do not have life-hopes of the first kind. I agree with Honderich that we have those kinds of life-hopes, so long as we are willing to define them as what they are—life-hopes regarding achievement and praise. Honderich is correct in asserting that we have them, but overstates the harm determinism does to them. The first kind of life-hope is perfectly compatible with determinism.
The Supposed Futility of Action

A common misconception of the problem of determinism concerns the efficacy of our actions. If hard determinism is true, the future is already fixed in place—some of our life-hopes are impossible, as they cannot possibly come to pass. This realisation could lead one to mistakenly believe that we have no good reason to pursue life-hopes, as they may be doomed to failure. The mistake being made here is twofold. Firstly, Honderich places life hopes such as ‘overcoming alcoholism’ or ‘being a good person’ into the second kind of life-hopes, those not requiring free will. This is because those kinds of life-hopes merely require the belief that they are possible. The existence of free will, or lack thereof, does nothing to change the approach to overcoming alcoholism.

Let us use a hypothetical alcoholic as our example. The alcoholic that currently believes in free will maintains the belief that his alcoholism is a problem that should and could be overcome—but he does not know for sure if he will succeed. As such, overcoming his alcoholism is a kind of life-hope. He can take certain actions toward thwarting his alcoholism, yet he does not know in advance whether or not he will succeed. The same is true for the alcoholic that does not believe in free will. He believes that it is a problem that must be overcome, and does not know for sure if he will succeed. It may be true that in a world with free will, his overcoming his alcoholism is always a possibility, whereas the determined alcoholic may well be alcoholic forever. Yet the future is unknown to us, and we cannot know whether or not our life-hopes are destined for failure or success until we attempt them. The existence of free will alone does little to change what kinds of outcomes are and are not possible for us. It may be that some life-hopes are doomed to failure—yet in a world with free will, many life-hopes would also end in failure. The fixed nature of the universe does not preclude the realisation of our life-hopes, so long as we seek them in earnest.
The second misunderstanding is the belief that action itself is futile in a
determined world—certain outcomes are destined in advance, so we might as well do
nothing and just wait for things to happen. To the credit of the Stoics, they had
anticipated such an objection to their own theory, which I discussed briefly in chapter
1. In short, they claim that a person who is destined to be virtuous, yet doesn’t practice
their virtues, will not become virtuous. This is because the end result requires the
preceding actions. The same can be said for life hopes, and life in general, under
determinism. It may well be the case that one is determined to succeed—yet that
determination only occurs when the preceding actions (hard work, for instance) take
place. Each of our actions (or lack of actions) have consequences for the future, even
more so than without determinism. Anyone that claims that events in the future are
fixed regardless of our actions mistakes determinism for some metaphysical destiny—
the two ideas are very much distinct. Some of our life-hopes may well be futile, yet
many of them will not be. We cannot determine which is which without trying.

Trading Away Negatives

Trading Away Love and Hate

Consider strong feelings of hatred toward another individual. The reasons for
this kind of hatred can be numerous—you may find their personality contemptible,
perhaps they have seriously wronged you in the past, maybe you find them to be
undeserving of their successes or insufficiently punished for their failures. A common
factor in these instances is that they cannot be easily justified if determinism is true.
We may well continue to hate people, but other people cannot be deserving of our
hatred. Someone that reflects deeply on the truth of determinism may be able to
examine their negative feelings towards others, in this instance hatred specifically, and
determine that the targets of their hate should be forgiven (or at least, no longer
hated). Letting go of this kind of hatred would surely be beneficial not only to the
target of your hatred but also to yourself. A common trope in fictional media is the
color that we colloquially ‘love to hate’, yet it shouldn’t be contentious to argue
that one’s life would be better with little to no hatred in it. Honderich makes this
suggestion, yet asks whether or not such a solution is practical. He claims that ‘we
cannot escape a kind of hatred and keep the counterpart kind of love’.\(^5\)

Understanding Honderich’s argument requires us to understand how he
believes this exchange might occur. Honderich seems to be assuming that love and
hatred are inexplicably bound together. We will internalize the belief that nobody can
be really praised or blamed for anything, and in doing so lose our hatred for others—
simultaneously, we will lose our capacity to love. The difficulty with this approach lies
in our reactive attitudes. The term ‘reactive attitudes’, coined by Peter Strawson, refers
to our immediate responses to the actions of others.\(^5\) Although Strawson explains that
our reactive attitudes cover a variety of emotions, he focuses on our negative reactions
of anger or disgust. He argues that widespread belief in determinism is unlikely to harm
our reactive attitudes, in part due to their purely reactive nature. We may be able to
mostly rid ourselves of hatred or love, but we will still have immediate reactive
emotions of those types. It is only upon reflection, sometime after we initially feel the
emotion, that we can attempt to rid ourselves of it. A true believer in determinism is
therefore unlikely to live a life without emotional reactions to others, and their
emotional reactions will simply be tempered after the fact by considering which are
deserved or worthwhile.

Let’s apply this to an example. An Individual is engaged in some activity or
another when suddenly someone begins insulting them without clear provocation. One
might feel anger, hatred, or perhaps fear in response. This kind of response is natural
and productive, as it might help us defend ourselves or extricate ourselves from
problematic scenarios. Afterwards, we can consider what emotional response is
appropriate moving forward. We might still want to hate this person, yet we can

\(^5\) Honderich, \textit{How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem}, 131
recognise that they wouldn’t be deserving of that hatred and the possible retributive actions that could flow from it. This practice, if implemented, might be an effective means of dealing with situations of undeserved blame and the feelings and actions that go along with it. The effectiveness of this method does not result in the situation Honderich has predicted, however, as we can quite easily maintain our feelings of love. This can be demonstrated via an additional example.

Let us imagine someone being treated to a surprisingly thoughtful or selfless gesture. They might have an immediate reaction of love or compassion. Once the moment has passed, they can reflect on those emotions. It might be true that the target of our love is not fully deserving of it in the same way that they would be if they had free will. Unlike the hatred example, however, we have no moral grounds to recant our feelings of love—because unlike the hatred example, our feelings of love do no harm to ourselves or others. In fact, these feelings of love or compassion may be beneficial to ourselves and others. The target of our love may be somewhat undeserving, yet the positive outcomes for them and ourselves means that we can persist with those feelings without any obligation to change. In addition, there are many religions that idealize the sacrifice of hatred for love. The Christian imperative to ‘turn the other cheek’ is just one such example.

One might object that the truth of determinism harms our capacity for love. It may be true, as Honderich suggests, that giving up our feelings of hatred would harm our corresponding feelings of love. He suggested that we find an alternative concept of love, one not bound up with free will, that we could use as a replacement for our standard concept. Free will plays a seemingly limited role in our feelings of love, however, and our typical concept of love can surely remain intact. The suggested harm of losing free will would be to our reactions to our loved ones. It seems a capricious form of love, however, that bases itself exclusively on the freely willed actions of a person. It’d be strange if a parent describing their love for their child listed off their achievements, or a married couple explained their love by speaking exclusively of the

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56 Honderich, How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem, 131
other’s actions. In reality, our love is based partially on other’s actions, and partially of a holistic judgement of their quality as a person. Our love would not grow weaker when we reflect on our hatred, as our feelings of love are not reliant on the ability to blame others—feelings of love have more in common with praise. Actions and attitudes of praise may be somewhat tempered by determinism, yet they can still persist—as explained previously, as praise does no harm, we have no obligation to recant it. Much like we can continue to praise, we can continue to love.

Pereboom further addresses this objection, arguing that the ‘love of another involves, most fundamentally, wishing well for the other, taking on many of the aims and desires of the other as one’s own, and a desire to be together with the other. Hard determinism threatens none of this’. More importantly, however, he argues that the truth of hard determinism places on us no obligation to see others in a cold, objective light. Although we might recognise that some of our emotional reactions to others are unwarranted, we are not in any way logically or morally obliged to give all of our interpersonal relationships this objective treatment. He claims that we can continue to proceed in our interpersonal relations in a mostly typical way:

‘She would resist anger, blame, and resentment, but she would not be exempt from pain and unhappiness upon being wronged. She might, if wronged, admonish, disregard the wrongdoing, or terminate the relationship. Although she would avoid gratitude, she would enjoy and express joy about other persons’ efforts in her behalf. No obstacle would be posed to her loving others.’

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58 Pereboom, "Determinism Al Dente," 336
Trading Away Success and Failure

Let us move on from love and hatred, and consider what other trades we may make. Honderich wonders whether or not we might be able to trade away our strong feelings of failure by also giving up success, asking: ‘...might it be that eschewing both the failure and the success is a good bargain?’.

This argument is an extension of Honderich’s claim that losing our guilt would be an improvement, which I discussed in chapter 2. Just as guilt can painfully hang over us, the fear and regret associated with failure are similarly unpleasant. Honderich splits failure into two types, which correspond roughly to his two kinds of life-hopes. The first kind has to do with being the one that performed the actions that led to failure, in a voluntary sense. This first kind of failure is mostly benign and has to do with the recognition that one’s efforts have failed, such that one could improve or change course. The second is more dangerous, coming from the belief that one is also the originator of their actions, such that the failure is wholly theirs. Honderich continues:

‘It is feelings of the second sort that are sharper. It is here that the grim verdict that I have failed seems most in place. There was something within my grasp, something that I had a chance to do or not to do, and I did not measure up. If we really take determinism to be true, we can rightly seek to escape from these darkest feelings. Determinism offers the compensation of an escape from a mordant kind of self-dislike and self-disapproval.’

I have already dismissed the concern raised by Smilansky, that ridding ourselves of guilt over past failures would remove our incentive to improve. Rather, we must consider whether or not we are better off with a weakened sense of success, if it also leads to a weaker sense of failure. I argued at the beginning of this chapter that our life-hopes

59 Honderich, How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem, 129

60 Ibid., 129
reliant on our ability to be praiseworthy for our achievements remain intact even if
determinism is true. As such, our ability to maintain feelings of success is surely still
intact. What Honderich is suggesting is not that we would automatically lose our
feelings of success and failure if we believed determinism to be true. Honderich’s
suggestion is a conscious trade-off—that we could convince ourselves that we are not
responsible for our successes and failures, as we are not fully responsible for our
actions. This runs contrary to my claims about praiseworthiness, however. Recall that
the reason we can continue to be praised for our achievements is because of the time
and effort that we had put into them. We may not have freely chosen to undertake
those efforts, but there can be no denying that an individual performed those actions,
and suffered the resulting costs. Because of this, we can continue to praise individuals
for their achievements.

We cannot easily cast aside this kind of praise. Failure and success are less
similar than one might think, however. When someone fails to accomplish a task, or
perhaps commits a moral failure, it is hard to find them responsible for the same
reasons we praise success. Failures borne of bad decisions can be cast aside, and
failures born of a lack of effort or dedication cannot truly be pinned on an individual.
Other forms of failure are the result of someone else’s effort, such as someone else
outperforming you. Another kind of failure might be the result of an overestimation of
one’s skill—taking on too much work, for instance. This kind of failure is merely a
failure of decision-making, however, and is also undeserving of real, deeply felt guilt.
None of these kinds of failure are clearing deserving of blame. The reason we can be
praised for our achievements is because of the time and effort put into them—blaming
someone for the time and effort that they put into something that failed is unintuitive.
Without free will, we cannot be responsible for bad decisions or failures of motivation
or dedication. Upon reflection, we can put aside this kind of failure.

To that end, we can do away with failure by either of two methods. The first of
these is the understanding that failures born of bad decisions can be set aside—we
cannot hold others responsible for their failures, and as such we shouldn’t hold
ourselves responsible either. The second is to draw another analogy between praise and blame. Because praise is generally harmless (or even beneficial), and blame is generally harmful, we do ourselves and others a disservice if we needlessly persist with blaming practices. If forgiving our failures whilst still celebrating our successes was simply made based on this cost-benefit analysis, that justification would still be sufficient.

One might object that I am claiming that failure serves no purpose. Yet the separation of failure into two kinds, those of voluntariness and those of origination, allows us to persist in failures of the first kind without the second. Honderich appears to see little issue in maintaining these lesser failures, and I am inclined to agree. Failures of voluntariness might be failures to achieve some kind of a goal, failing to pass a test, or perhaps failing a physical benchmark. This kind of failure is the sort that allows us to improve. We might not be worthy of blame for these kinds of failures, but they allow us to understand areas of our lives that require improvement—if we lacked this kind of feeling of failure, we would have no reference by which to judge our capabilities.

**Nature and Meditation**

The task of affirmation is not merely to demonstrate that our lives are unchanged if determinism is true—such a result would be akin to intransigence, the claim that the truth or falsity of determinism doesn’t really matter. Affirmation requires us to gain something if determinism is true. To succeed in affirmation, we should be able to feel that understanding the truth of determinism is an improvement over a naïve belief in free will. I see two possible approaches here, and both involve a deepening understanding of ourselves as determined. In both cases, I will briefly put aside the conceptual analysis of determinism, and instead consider some practical approaches. One of those approaches is to attempt a greater connection with nature,
by somehow seeing ourselves as a part of it. Honderich explained this approach, by listing a variety of philosophers throughout history that have suggested this path:

‘What exists, for [Spinoza], is the single thing which can be called God or Nature. By entering into a certain relation to it, we can achieve peace of mind... others have said I can escape the triviality of my individual existence, and also try to deal with the prospect of my death, by identifying with something greater... Marx and Engels in yet other ways recommend a kind of acceptance of nature. Engels speaks of a tranquillity to be had from accepting nature as determined’. 61

This kind of idea should not be foreign—much of the appeal of camping, hiking, or taking vacations in areas ‘untouched’ by mankind is found in the desire to be amongst nature. These kinds of settings can be quite relaxing to some, and it is this kind of relaxation that inspires this idea. It is, of course, possible to commune with nature whilst believing in free will. This approach is even stronger with a belief in determinism, however, as it bridges the divide between humanity and the natural world. Nature can provide us certain insights into our own identities, and it may be easier to do so when the barriers between humanity and nature are weaker. We do not possess any supernatural abilities that set us aside from other animals, and the idea that the world has a certain order to it could lead one to a greater appreciation for the marvels we see in nature. Alternatively, believing ourselves to be determined, in the same way we often see nature, can change us from external observers to active participants in nature. Honderich says little in support of this approach, in part because there is very little to say about it. 62 I agree that little can be said on this point. I can, however, suggest an additional approach.

61 Honderich, How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem, 128
62 Honderich, How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem, 128
The Benefits of Mindfulness Meditation

Writing this thesis from within the confines of western culture assumes a certain attitude towards free will, along with the assumption that most of us naively believe that we have it. I am no expert on eastern culture and religion and will avoid making baseless assumptions about cultural differences. I can, however, point to a modern, western phenomenon which has been borrowed from Buddhist practice—mindfulness meditation. The premise of mindfulness meditation is simple. The practitioner seats themselves in a comfortable position and proceeds to analyse themselves and their surroundings. Ostensibly, the goal of this exercise is to clear one’s mind of thoughts; in reality, the goal is to become aware of just how tenacious these thoughts really are. By watching these thoughts come and go, as they inevitably will, one can achieve an understanding that these thoughts aren’t coming from conscious thought, but are instead autonomous generations of the mind. Blackmore recounts her own experience, wherein she used mindfulness meditation specifically to answer the question of ‘do I have free will?’ She describes the result as such:

‘I realise with a certain horror that by relinquishing myself to the world, and accepting that actions just happen, I have given up all personal responsibility. It’s gone. I cannot believe in it any more. There’s no one in here making the decisions. They are making themselves. I have just walked in from the hut, fed the cats, had breakfast, and made loads of little decisions along the way, all with alert attention to what’s happening, and with no sense of myself doing it. It seems so right. It seems truthful to the way things really are.’

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I’m hardly the first to suggest that meditation and determinism have synergy. Both Terry Hyland and Riccardo Repetti, in addition to Blackmore, have claimed that mindfulness meditation can confer additional benefits under determinism. However, the three disagree to the extent or kind of benefits given. Hyland argues that mindfulness meditation ‘enhances freedom by expanding the human capacity for being in the here and now’.\(^{64}\) This is because Buddhist theory understands free will as a delusion that humans are driven to in order to escape from suffering.\(^{65}\) Hyland never clarifies what this ‘freedom’ meditation could grant refers to, although he recognises that any form of meditation would still be grounded by causality. As such, I find Hyland to be in agreement with my own understanding, espousing meditation as a method of creating a pleasant, free will type feeling, without the problematic baggage normally connected to free will belief. Furthermore, he asserts that meditation has a variety of other benefits, including ‘compassion, lovingkindness, equanimity and sympathetic joy’, which he argues are ‘of more lasting value than putative notions of unbridled freedom’.\(^{66}\)

Repetti goes one step further, however, arguing that mindfulness meditation doesn’t merely create a positive illusion of free will, but can allow us access to the real thing. He argues, in line with my own arguments, that mindfulness meditation can grant a more thorough understanding of the causes of our emotions. By better understanding these different actions and reactions, we can make better decisions about how to live, whilst further understanding the illusory nature of free will. In contrast with my view, however, Repetti argues that mindfulness meditation allows us to influence these emotional states, such that we can gain increasing autonomy over them, free from external factors.\(^{67}\) He argues this point by rejecting the claim that any minor influence on our mind robs us entirely of free will—we can still be free whilst we

\(^{64}\) Terry Hyland, “Mindfulness, Free Will and Buddhist Practice: Can Meditation Enhance Human Agency?,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 31 (2014), 136

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 136

\(^{66}\) Ibid., 138

\(^{67}\) Rick Repetti, “Meditation and Mental Freedom: A Buddhist Theory of Free Will,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 17 (2010), 180
are influenced, so long as the external influence is below a certain unspecified level. Exercising mindfulness meditation would allow one to reduce the level of external influence, eventually reaching the Buddhist state of nirvana, wherein one would have complete autonomy.\textsuperscript{68} I must disagree with Repetti’s conclusions. The mere fact that we understand the external influences on our mental states does not allow us freedom from them—it merely shifts where those influences come from. Repetti seems to be assuming that our mind would have no content if not for external events—furthermore, that our mind is somehow capable of extricating itself from external influences. Clearly, I must reject this conclusion. There is no method by which one could separate themselves from causality, and such an outcome would hardly be desirable. However, I still believe that meditation has positive outcomes for those with true belief in determinism. Hyland articulates the secular position well, writing:

Hard-headed determinists might still want to claim that such states of mindfulness must have been caused by antecedent states. In answer to this, we might say that outside of nirvāṇa (or some fantasy utopia), limitless freedom is an impossible ideal. The benefits of mindfulness... are achievable ideals and, arguably, as close as humans can approximate to freedom.\textsuperscript{69}

The unifying idea behind these three scholars is the belief that meditation can provide benefits when used in conjunction with belief in determinism. The distinction between them rests in precisely how this meditation might be helpful, ranging from emotionally beneficial (Blackmore), through to granting freedom from determinism (Repetti). Without linking myself to anything metaphysically problematic, I can assert that mindfulness meditation can be an aid in attaining affirmation. The experience of meditation can be quite profound, but I find it especially so when used in conjunction with a focus on determinism. I hold no naïve hope that all who truly believe in

\textsuperscript{68} Repetti, "Meditation and Mental Freedom," 196
\textsuperscript{69} Hyland, "Mindfulness, Free Will and Buddhist Practice," 138
determinism might take up meditation. However, mindfulness meditation appears to be the most practical and immediate path to recognising the illusory nature of free will, whilst simultaneously conferring the kinds of benefits affirmation and meditation can bring.

**True Belief in Determinism**

Being confronted with the truth of determinism would only result in dismay if one actually believed what they were hearing was true—likewise with intransigence. It should go without saying that affirmation also requires true belief in determinism. Honderich identified this, claiming that this belief was essential if affirmation was to succeed.\(^\text{70}\) With that being said, he doubts that many of us will be capable of such true belief. Even if one is persuaded by the arguments for determinism, they may yet maintain the feeling of free will. As Honderich puts it, ‘There is a paradox there, but also a truth’.\(^\text{71}\) Susan Blackmore delves deeper into this divide, arguing that believing in free will and having the feeling of having free will are distinct. She explains this divide, and her relation to it well:

‘I neither believe in free will, nor have the feeling of having free will. These two statements are different… In denying the existence of free will, I stand with many others on one side of this long debate. The second is a personal claim about how I live my life, and here I am in a very small majority. Indeed people have often told me that the way I live my life is impossible, or that it’s possible but if everyone lived this way morality and the rule of law would collapse and all hell would break loose. But unless I am deeply deluded (which is possible), they are wrong.’\(^\text{72}\)

\(^{70}\) Honderich, *How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem*, 131  
\(^{71}\) Ibid., 131  
Blackmore has struck to the heart of the issue, as far as belief in determinism is concerned. One might believe that determinism is true, insofar as they are convinced by the arguments in its favour. However, these people might continue to live as though they had free will, without fully internalizing these arguments. Blackmore articulates this approach as the state of accepting that free will is an illusion, and yet choosing to remain deluded. The alternative, which I refer to as true belief in determinism, is to actively reject the illusion of free will.

**Practical Approaches to True Belief**

It might be objected that all of this talk about affirmation is moot, because belief in determinism itself is impossible. Blackmore writes on her experiences encountering this very objection, including the assertion that such a belief would leave one schizophrenic, paralysed by analysis, or simply deluding oneself. However, true belief in determinism is, in fact, possible.

How are we to achieve this true belief? Blackmore suggests two practical exercises, to allow one to more clearly see themselves as determined. The first is an exercise in action. A common fear of rejecting free will belief is the belief that we would lose any motivation to act—as Blackmore puts it, ‘why would I ever get up in the morning?’ The best approach to solving this is to actually attempt it. For a while, she says, one might get anxious, or enjoy resting in bed. Eventually, however, they might get bored, or want a coffee, or the like. Once that task is complete, they might want a shower, or to brush their teeth, and then to have breakfast, and so on. As you move from one desire to another, the day goes on and things get done. Blackmore claims that practising in this way allows one to understand better where their motivations to act come from—they don’t come from an ‘I’ that’s piloting the body, but in fact come

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73 Blackmore, "Living without Free Will," 163
74 Ibid., 164
75 Ibid., 168
from all over the place. In this way, not only can you begin to internalize determinism, but you can see that living without free will is in no way harmful to our day to day lives.

The second task Blackmore describes has to do with our internal experience of being conscious. She explains the process of asking a pair of questions to her students:

‘In the first of twenty weeks they were given the question ‘Am I conscious now?’ and told to ask themselves this question as many times as they could every day for a week and then report back. Many of them found this incredibly hard, but those who managed it reported that something very odd sometimes happened. It was as though asking the question made them become more conscious, as though they were not quite sure whether they were conscious a moment before or not. This led naturally onto the second week’s exercise which was to ask “What was I conscious of a moment ago?”’

Unlike the first exercise, this one can be performed easily in any situation. The results should also be fairly consistent—what exactly we were conscious of in the past is unknown to us, because we weren’t conscious of anything at that point. This inner self, which would be key for our exercise of free will, is often conspicuously absent. As she points out, it seems to appear only when we actively call upon it. As Blackmore explains, this conscious self that appears is an illusory construct that is ‘fleeting constructed when required but most of the time is absent… This is the same self who, if it existed, would have free will, and dismantling this self is part of the task of living without free will.’

76 Blackmore, "Living without Free Will," 168
77 Ibid., 169
78 Ibid., 170
It may be asked why true belief in determinism is necessary to gain the benefits of affirmation. After all, many of the benefits I have listed tend to do with seeing the world in a particular way. Seeing others not as truly evil, but instead as acting out their predetermined path, or seeing the achievements of ourselves and others as based not on irrelevant factors of genetics and luck, but on physical accomplishments—These kinds of beliefs could still be possible without true belief in determinism. However, the benefit of true belief in determinism rests deeper than this. It is true, as Honderich says, that the act of affirmation could come down to ‘looking on the bright side, or perhaps putting a good face on things, or even making the best of a bad job’. Even still, Honderich asserts that true belief in determinism is a requirement for affirmation. This is because, in his view, losing free will comes with a host of problems. In order for us to succeed in affirmation, we must convince ourselves that those losses were never real losses in the first place, as free will can never and could never have existed—we won’t mourn the things we can’t lose. However, the opposite is equally true. There are benefits to be had in rejecting free will belief, yet these benefits require us to really believe that we have them. How are we to believe that we are better off with determinism if we don’t truly believe that it even exists? There are gains to be had, but it is not sufficient for us to wish them to be real—rather, we must believe we can attain them. Once one gets used to affirmation, they could be more accepting, less judgemental, leading better emotional lives with less anger and hatred, expecting less. It might sound like a belief picture, but when you consider the emotional benefits, things aren’t so bad.

One might lament, were they to believe in determinism and achieve affirmation, that many will struggle to successfully share their belief. Honderich points out, however, that this difficulty may only exist for us. There will likely be a time where

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79 Honderich, *How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem*, 131
80 *Ibid.*, 132
free will belief has waned, and many fully believe in determinism. This future population will not risk the feeling of dismay, as people ‘do not go on fully desiring what we \textit{really believe} we cannot have... we, or those who come after us, will not desire what they really believe is not to be had. They will have no need to give up in life either’.\footnote{Honderich, \textit{How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem}, 132}

\textbf{Affirmation in Society}

There may exist the fear that losing free will belief may have negative consequences for society, and this fear would make affirmation more difficult. To address those fears, I’ll present some arguments demonstrating the positive effects of belief in determinism for our immediate relations, and society at large. To this end, I will include a brief discussion of crime and punishment when discussing the issue of free will, followed by a brief examination of free will belief and inequality.

\textbf{Criminal Justice}

Being the target of hatred or blame is unpleasant. Often, the target of hatred or blame is a criminal of some kind, although this may often be an acquaintance that has wronged us, or some other minor affront. Belief in a free will allows us to justify the response of blame or punishment in those situations. Our typical viewpoint in punishment scenarios is from the perspective of the victim. It is worth considering, however, the experience of being the criminal, or the selfish acquaintance. Just as we lack free will, they too lack free will and are not responsible for their actions. As a result, any hatred or blame we attribute to them is misplaced. When someone is being praised, one might argue that they are still somewhat deserving of their praise (as I have done) and that we can continue to praise them in this fashion. One contingency of
this approach, however, is the fact that praise is rarely harmful. The same cannot be said for blame. Because blame is generally harmful, either because it leads to punishment (which is clearly harmful), or simply because being blamed is often an unpleasant experience, we must have good epistemic justification for continuing to blame people. It would be immoral to continue causing harm to people if such harm could no longer be justified. This argument was made by Richard Double against libertarianism, although his argument can be extended to compatibilists that defend blame and punishment practices. He articulates his argument against punishment here:

‘Holding persons morally responsible includes a wide range of positive and negative behaviours: expressed reactive attitudes, verbal recrimination, praise and blame, retributive punishment and just-deserts rewards, all the way to eternal torment in Hell and bliss in Heaven. But because even the mildest of the adverse behaviours harms persons, libertarians use the assignment of moral responsibility as a justificatory mantra that turns otherwise immoral treatment into just-deserts goods... Libertarians agree that to assign those adverse aspects of moral responsibility to persons who lack libertarian free will is to act wrongly. By the same reasoning, then, libertarians need to provide a moral justification for visiting these evils upon persons... If libertarians are to hold persons responsible while avoiding the charge of treating persons immorally, libertarians should provide epistemic justification that persons actually make libertarian choices.’

Double’s argument rests on a powerful imperative—without good epistemic justification for moral responsibility, punishment is morally equivalent to wrongfully harming innocents. I suspect that the reason Double positioned his argument against libertarians specifically was due to their particularly shaky metaphysics. Making a similar argument against compatibilism would prove more difficult, as compatibilist

82 Richard Double, ”The Moral Hardness of Libertarianism,” Philo 5, no. 2 (2002), §1
arguments are often more complex and grounded in reality. However, the general thrust of Double’s argument remains—if we are going to punish people, we need solid proof that these people somehow deserve to be punished, as we may be doing them an injustice.

There is value in examining this argument from the other direction. Rather than looking for ways to justify punishment, as Double accuses libertarians of doing, perhaps we should look for ways to avoid punishment, so as to avoid harm in any form. Gregg Caruso suggests an alternative criminal justice system, that avoids utilizing punishment, which he claims could be more effective than the particularly ineffective system we have in place now. Before considering his approach, let us re-examine why it is that we engage in the punishment of criminals.

Western culture has a worrying fixation on retaliating against those that commit crimes. This is because we typically believe that people that do wrong deserve to be punished. This kind of punishment, known as retributive punishment, is concerned more with just-deserts than it is with preventing crime in the future. The second reason that we engage in punishment is because we believe that the threat of punishment constitutes a good deterrent against crime. The first justification is clearly false—as we do not have free will, we cannot be morally responsible for our actions. As such, we can never be deserving of punishment, and punishment is immoral under a retributive justification. Yet without the means of punishing criminals, how can we create an effective deterrent to crime? Any solution put forward would need to minimize the harm to criminals wherever possible, so as to avoid morally problematic scenarios. One could, of course, bite the philosophical bullet and punish criminals anyway, an ‘ends justifies the means’ approach. Ideally, however, we would seek a more charitable approach—such as the quarantine model put forward by Pereboom, and advanced by Caruso.

The quarantine model treats criminals in much the same way we treat carriers of dangerous, infectious diseases. The analogy with quarantine is apt in two ways:
firstly, the carriers of disease are not harmed for carrying the disease; second, the carrier of the disease is segregated from society, such that the disease can do minimal harm. As it is with diseases, so it is with criminal behaviour. This approach has a key advantage over the retributive model—namely, it does little harm to innocents (as criminals have no free will, they cannot be responsible for their actions). Furthermore, the approach is somewhat malleable in its intensity, much like a typical criminal justice system. Much like a life sentence is unlikely to be passed down for mere theft, total quarantine would not be required for such a crime. Likewise, whilst retributive punishment might ‘rightfully’ give a life sentence to a murderer, the quarantine model could also institute a life sentence in quarantine, so as to protect the public indefinitely if necessary. The key distinction between the two is that typical retributive punishment seeks not only to protect the public from the murderer, but also to inflict suffering on the murderer, both because they ‘deserve’ it, and because it might serve as a deterrent to others. Likewise, the quarantine model abstains from punishment, because to do so would be immoral.

However, one might object that such an approach fails to sufficiently deter would-be criminals from committing crimes; for instance, Smilansky argued that this response to crime, which he characterised as ‘funishment’, allows criminals to perform a cost-benefit analysis which usually makes committing the crime more desirable. After all, as he concluded, ‘even if he is caught, he faces only some time in an institute of funishment, which – apart from being separated from lawful society – will be like a fabulous holiday’. Caruso responded, arguing that the root of this objection is not in a failure of the theory, but instead a naïve understanding of the effectiveness of punishment as a deterrent. According to Caruso, critics of this theory tend to have a ‘narrow, myopic focus on punishment’. Although we might typically get upset at the idea that rapists or murderers might not be punished, or that punishment is not used as a deterrent, Caruso argues that the best approach is to undertake a holistic review

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84 Gregg D. Caruso, Free Will Skepticism and the Public Health-Quarantine Model, 50:50
of crime prevention—focused not merely on what to do to those that break the law, but how to prevent those crimes being committed in the first place. He draws another parallel with health institutions, arguing that the role of these groups is not merely the treatment of existing disease, but the prevention of disease. Indeed, a major outbreak of disease would be considered a failure of its primary function, and only then is quarantine required. The same approach, he argues, should be taken regarding crime. Our current focus on punishment as both solution and deterrent is not only immoral, but not clearly effective. He argues in favour of a broader approach, that includes an examination of the causes of crime, such as ‘social injustice, poverty, systematic disadvantage, mental health issues, and addiction’. This focus on prevention of crime, rather than the ‘treatment’ of criminals after the fact, is the primary distinction between Caruso and Pereboom. In either case, the public-health safety model provides an alternative justice system that is at once both more humane in light of determinism, and potentially more effective at dealing with criminal behaviour.

Inequality

Poverty specifically is one major contributor to criminal behaviour, not to mention the negative quality of life and health outcomes associated with it. One roadblock to dealing with poverty, however, is its foundation in a deep-seated belief that people are responsible for their own lot in life. This idea seems particularly prevalent within western cultures, especially since there are no explicit laws outlawing social mobility—in theory, anyone from any background could attain any degree of success or wealth, with the right amount of effort. In practice, this is far from the truth.

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85 Caruso, Free Will Skepticism and the Public Health-Quarantine Model, 51:45
86 Ibid., 52:00
88 Ibid., 35
Inequality has a compounding effect, as those in a privileged position can enjoy a wide variety of benefits, including knowing the right people, a better education, much lower risk (if a business ventures collapses, the privileged can often fall back on their savings, or those of a parent), and a belief that success is possible. The inverse is true for those born into poverty. Free will belief, however, allows us to understand these inequalities as being self-created. After all, those in poverty could have made better, free decisions that could have increased their wealth—likewise, the wealthy simply made good decisions that they deserve to be praised for. Daniel Dennett argued in apathetic support of this position, asking: ‘Is [the system] fair enough not to be worth worrying about? Of course. After all, luck averages out in the long run’. \(^{89}\) James Miles, on the other hand, argued that free will belief provides a justification for inequality, one that we must work to eradicate. He argued:

‘free will justification is fundamentally the inability to admit that others have been, or will be, less lucky in life than you… To argue that we don’t need fair, we just need ‘fair enough’? to suggest that unfairness is ‘not to be worth worrying about’? to make up stories about those who didn’t get the breaks we did—stories about how ‘luck averages out’ in human life? That they freely chose their own misfortune?’ \(^{90}\)

If free will belief allows us to ignore the injustice and inequality in society, then free will sceptics and determinists can take solace in knowing that they are at least potentially more understanding of the suffering of others. Furthermore, it places upon those with true belief in determinism a moral imperative to do better, given their greater necessity for compassion. We cannot fall back on the excuses given by those that believe in free will.

\(^{89}\) Daniel Dennett, *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), 95

\(^{90}\) James B. Miles, *The Free Will Delusion: How We Settled for the Illusion of Morality* (Leicestershire: Troubadour Publishing Ltd, 2015), 8
Appendix

The Chaotic Universe

Some of us may yet cling to the belief that a world with free will is better than a world without. Honderich claims that this belief is really held by all of us, contained within the hope that we can change the future.\textsuperscript{91} To assert that we all have a specific type of hope, whose content is ‘I hope determinism is false’, is begging the question. I can readily assert that I do not have this kind of life hope, and I see little basis to claim that many or most of us would have this type of hope. However, Honderich argues that we are all at least \textit{capable} of having this kind of a hope. To demonstrate this, he asked us to consider a world in which determinism is true, the ‘iron-block universe’. The purpose of his example is to attempt to demonstrate how unpleasant a world without free will would supposedly be. Yet any attempt of this kind is misleading—we need only look out a window to see what this ‘iron-block universe’ is like. We already live in it.

Rather than create needless caricatures of our own universe, we should consider what a world \textit{with} free will would be like. I will refer to this as the ‘chaotic universe’. Within the chaotic universe, all persons have free will, such that they can act independently of causality in order to originate a chain of events. We can conceive of this in multiple ways—perhaps via quantum indeterminacy, as suggested by Bob Doyle\textsuperscript{92}, or maybe through a hidden free will that only \textit{seems} to be determined, as suggested by Kant\textsuperscript{93}. Maybe we would have a more religious form of free will, such as a soul, a tiny ‘unmoved mover’ that can make our decisions.

\textsuperscript{91} Honderich, \textit{How Free Are You? The Determinism Problem}, 127
\textsuperscript{92} Doyle, \textit{Free Will: The Scandal in Philosophy}, 371
First of all, a person’s personality would have no effect on the way they make decisions, as this would be a causal constraint on decision-making. In fact, nobody would have a personality at all, and any personality someone did have would simply be the result of chance, and that personality could change at any time. James Miles points out that free will via quantum indeterminacy would wreak havoc on our ability to predict people’s actions. He writes:

‘Acts would sometimes come out of nowhere if quantum indeterminacy was involved in human behaviour: not only would you not be able to predict, trust or rely upon others’ behaviour, you wouldn’t even be able to predict, trust or rely on your own behaviour, because it would be coming out of nowhere and from outside of character’. 94

Let us move on, and consider a soul based variant of free will. Some believe that our immortal soul, wherever it might come from, is the determining factor of our choices. Despite any external influences, we can rely on our soul to make unbiased decisions. Yet the precise mechanics of the soul’s operations elude us. If the soul makes decisions free from causality, it cannot be formed by our experiences. Only two options exist – the soul acts randomly, or the soul has a fixed nature that can never be adapted. I dislike the idea of my soul acting randomly just as much as I dislike a soul that stops me from ever changing.

Are we not better off in a world without free will? This ‘iron-block universe’, so coldly named, allows us to have personalities, and to be shaped by our experiences. We may not be able to change the future, but we can create it, collaboratively, via our thoughts and actions. A chaotic universe, a universe with free will, is unresponsive to our actions. This kind of a world is in constant flux, nothing we do could matter. A universe with a fixed future is not a universe where our actions have no meaning, as our actions are the means by which the future is created.

94 Miles, The Free Will Delusion: How We Settled for the Illusion of Morality, 15
Evil and Free Will

There is one last thing to consider, which I believe to be of paramount importance. This is the fact that, without free will, there can exist no true evil.

Consider the most contemptible, horrible person you can imagine. Feel free to imagine a historical figure, or a hypothetical warmonger, or tyrant, or murderer. In a world with free will, these kinds of people not only undertake their horrific actions, they also freely will to perform these acts. These people can opt not to commit terrible acts, yet they decide based on the blackness of their soul, or a corrupted conscience, or some other source of free will, that they will go forth with these actions. In a world with free will, these kinds of people are living instances of the worst kinds of fears we have about human nature. Honderich spoke of a deep-seated feeling of guilt—the idea that we had failed, that we could have done better. I feel this guilt most keenly when I reflect upon horrible, man-made tragedies in our collective history. If free will was real, we could have prevented these outcomes, had we only chosen to be less cruel. We really would be responsible for those things we had allowed to happen.

However, free will does not exist, and determinism provides me with solace when I reflect upon these events. Rather than seeing them as exclusively the outcome of freely willed cruelty and malice, we can see these events for what they are—unfortunate outcomes forced upon us by causality. We could not have prevented them from occurring, yet we also are not entirely to blame for them. There is an ‘evil’ in those that allowed these events to occur, yet a far greater evil would be to blame if we had freely chosen those paths. We are not only partially absolved of some guilt that they occurred, we can attempt to learn from those mistakes. It is true that certain horrible events in our future may be determined to occur, and as such are unavoidable. This does not imply, however, that ‘evil’ people cannot be redeemed or influenced. In fact, the reverse is true. Without free will, we need not fear that each person has an unfathomable evil within them, such that they could unleash it at any moment. This
kind of evil (or cruelty, or malice) is the result of their circumstances—circumstances that we can change.


