

## **Robert Kane, A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will**

Chapters 1-5 & 7 (pages 1-52, and 67-79)

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**A common thought regarding free will:** “We feel...it is ‘up to us’ what we choose and how we act; and this means [a] we could have chosen or acted otherwise...[and] [b] the ultimate sources of our actions lie in us and not outside us in factors beyond our control” (6).

**A related common thought:** The ability to choose/will freely is necessary for being responsible for our decisions and actions.

- Responsible = deserving of praise and blame. Sometimes called being “morally responsible.”

**Crucial distinction:** Determinism and Indeterminism (5-6).

Let us consider free will with each of these in mind...

### **Part I: Determinism and Free Will**

**Crucial Question:** Is determinism *compatible* with having a free will?

- “No” = Incompatibilism/incompatibilist
- “Yes” = Compatibilism/incompatibilist
  - Note: Being an (in)compatibilist doesn’t mean one thinks determinism is true/false. We are, for now, wondering whether determinism is *in principle* compatible with free will.

Let us consider each of these in more detail...

### **Incompatibilism: Free Will and Determinism are Incompatible**

The argument:

1. If determinism is true, then our acts are the necessary consequences of the laws of nature and events in the remote past.
2. If it is not up to us what the laws of nature are and it is not up to us what events happened in the remote past, then our acts are consequences of things that are not up to us.
3. If our acts are necessary consequences of things that aren’t up to us, then our acts are not up to us.
4. If determinism is true, our acts are not up to us.

Further:

1. Free will requires the ability to do otherwise.
2. If determinism is true then we do not have the ability to do otherwise.
3. If determinism is true then we do not have free will.

### **Compatibilism: Free Will and Determinism are Compatible**

**Freedom, according to the compatibilist:** the “*power or ability*” to want or decide to do something (13).

- If I have the power or ability to do something, then there is nothing constraining or impeding me from doing it.

**Question:** How is this understanding of freedom compatible with determinism?

**Answer:** One may be determined to have the power or ability to do something or other, and be determined to be without constraints/impediments.

**Question/Objection to this conception of freedom:** “But doesn’t freedom also require alternative paths into the future, and hence the freedom *to do otherwise*?” (13).

**Compatibilist response:** you are free to do otherwise – you can do otherwise – if you have the power or ability to do otherwise and there are no constraints/impediments to your exercising that power or ability.

- Freedom to do otherwise = you *would* have done otherwise (nothing would have stopped you) *if* you had wanted or desired to do otherwise” (14).

**Compatibilists:** “You only think determinism is incompatible with free will because you’re confused!”

1. Determinism is not constraint, coercion, or compulsion.
  - a. Determinism, things acting according to laws of nature, does not necessarily imply that we act *against* our wills, or prevent us from doing or choosing what we want (18).
2. Causation is not constraint.
  - a. Constraints, not causes of any kind, undermine freedom. Constraints are causes, but only when those causes are “impediments or hindrances to our doing what we want, such as being tied up or paralyzed.”
  - b. Some causes help us to act freely, like muscular strength and “inner strength.”
  - c. When we make choices, do what we want, *etc.*, our choices are caused by our characters and motives, and this is a good thing.
    - If our actions were not caused by our characters and motives, we could not be held responsible for what we do (18).
3. Determinism is not control by other agents.
  - a. Manipulation by others undermines freedom, but determinism is not that.
4. Determinism is not fatalism.
  - a. According to fatalism, what is going to happen is going to happen *no matter what we do*. But determinism is the view that what will happen depends on what we do.
5. Determinism does not make robots of us.
  - a. “We reason and deliberate, question our motives, reflect on our values, make plans about the future, reform our characters, and make promises to others that we then feel obligated to keep” (21).
  - b. Determinism does not rule out these capacities; they are what make us free and responsible (insects don’t have them and so are not responsible).

**Objection #1 to Compatibilism:** One cannot change the laws of nature or facts about the past even if one wanted to (27).

**Objection #2:** Consider a case in which a person cannot have wanted otherwise (29).

1. A compatibilist says she *could have done otherwise*.
  - The compatibilist says this because it is true that she would have done otherwise if she had wanted to do otherwise.
2. But she cannot want to do otherwise.
3. Thus, she could not have done otherwise.
4. Thus, the compatibilist analysis of ‘could have done otherwise’ is flawed.

## **Part II: Indeterminism and Free Will**

**Crucial Question:** We have discovered indeterminism in the world, so why worry about whether determinism is compatible with free will?

**Three responses (8-10):**

1. There are debates about how we should interpret the data of quantum physics, and some hold that a deterministic interpretation of the phenomena is the right one.
2. Even if the behavior of elementary particles is indeterministic, what exactly does this have to do with the behavior of *humans*?
  - Indeterminism on the micro level does not entail indeterminism on the macro level. Humans exist on the macro level, so determinism may still be true of them.

3. Indeterminism is gaining ground in physics, but losing ground in biology, biochemistry, neuroscience, psychiatry/psychology, and other social and behavior sciences.

**New Question:** Suppose indeterminism is true; does this show us that/how free will is possible?

- “Yes” = Libertarianism/Liberterian

**Crucial question: are free will and *indeterminism* compatible?**

### **Objections to Thinking Free Will and Indeterminism are Compatible**

**Objection #1: Lack of control over what happens → lack of responsibility for what has happened**

- i. If indeterminism is true, events that are undetermined happen merely by chance and are not under the *control* of anything, including a person.
- ii. If what happens is not under the control of a person, the person is not responsible for what has happened.
- iii. If indeterminism is true, no one is responsible for undetermined events.

**Objection #2: Lack of control → *undermines* free will**

- i. If a choice is the result of an indeterministic process, the person does not control the choice.
- ii. If a person is not in control of her choice, she does not have free will.
- iii. Indeterminism undermines free will (by undermining control).

**Objection #3:** It is of no help to suppose the indeterminism occurs after one’s choice but before one’s action; this would be equivalent to a twitch in your arm after the choice to cut something; it is a constraint on your freedom, not an enhancement of it.

**Objection #4:** Indeterministic choices are random, arbitrary, inexplicable, and irrational.

Determinism = same past, same future  
Indeterminism = same past, different future

Imagine someone deliberates about whether to go to Austin or Dallas for a career and decides that, all things considered, it is best to go to Austin.

Determinism = same deliberations (same desires, beliefs, hopes, fears, *etc.*), same choice  
Indeterminism = same deliberations, different choice!

**Claim:** A person who chooses differently, who chooses Dallas over Austin, after the *same* deliberation, is “senseless and irrational” (16).

**Objection #5:** Undetermined choices are random choices, like flipping a coin; we are not free if major decisions about our lives are random.

**Objection #6: The Luck Objection (37-8).**

### **The Libertarian Responds**

“If an agent may act or acts otherwise, given the same past circumstances and laws of nature, then some *additional* factor *not included among the past circumstances or laws* must account for the difference in outcome,” where this additional factor explains how what is done it not “merely random, arbitrary, and inexplicable” (39).

**Question:** What is the extra factor?

**Proposal #1:** The mind/soul, conceived of as distinct from the body (an endorsement of substance dualism).

- This requires that there is some indeterminism in the world, for a “gap” in the causal chain is needed so that the soul can intervene.

**Objection:** An appeal to dualism will not help in solving the problem of reconciling free will and indeterminism.

**Argument:**

1. If one thinks determinism is incompatible with free will, then one cannot allow for mental determinism any more than physical determinism; libertarians must claim that the mind/soul operates indeterministically (41).
2. One’s deliberations thus indeterministically result in a decision; the same instance of deliberations (performed by the soul/mind) can result in different conclusions.
3. But, just as before, this makes one’s final decision irrational, inexplicable, and arbitrary; that the decision came from a disembodied soul rather than an embodied brain is irrelevant.

**Possible response:** How the immaterial mind works is a mystery, and so it is a mystery as to how the decision is ultimately rational, explicable, and non-arbitrary (44).

**Reply:** This is just to assert that the appeal to the soul works, but offers no reason whatsoever to believe it.

**Proposal #2:** The *agent* him/herself is the “extra factor.”

**Basic claim:** “Free agents are capable of causing their own free acts in a special way, a way that is not reducible to causation by circumstances, events, or states of affairs (45).

- Question: What caused the action?
- Agent-causationist’s response: The *agent*.
- The causal chain of events *begins with the agent causing something* (46).

**Question/objection #1:** But what causes the agent to cause what (s)he does?

**Response:** To be an agent cause just is to be the kind of thing that is not itself caused by anything.

**Reply:** But this is just saying that, by definition, agents aren’t caused to do what they do; that is stipulation, not discovery.

**Objection #2:** This does not eliminate the arbitrariness of a decision.

- Granting that agent’s are uncaused causes, it seems that there is nothing to direct the agent to choose this rather than that (*e.g.* Austin or Dallas), and if one agent causes the decision to go to Dallas rather than Austin, even though all the considerations favor going to Austin, then one’s agent-caused decision is irrational, inexplicable, and arbitrary (49).
- We have merely gone from the randomness of choices to the random agent-causings of choices.

**Objection #3:** The Luck Objection (again, 49-50).

### One Last Skeptical Argument

**Strawson's "Basic Argument"**, which is claimed to be true whether determinism or indeterminism is true:

1. You do what you do because of the way you are (your nature or character).
2. To be truly responsible for what you do, you must be truly responsible for the way you are (for your nature or character).
3. But to be truly responsible for the way you are, you must have done something in the past for which you were also responsible to make yourself, at least in part, the way you are.
4. But if you were truly responsible for doing something in the past to make yourself what you are now, you must have been responsible for the way you were then (for your nature or character) at that earlier time.
5. But to have been responsible for the way you were at that earlier time, you must have done something for which you were responsible at a still earlier time to make yourself the way you were at that earlier time, and so on backward.
6. Here one is setting of on a regress that, in the case of human beings at least, cannot go back forever (71-2).

**Possible response:** But as we age we change our natures/characters.

**Reply:** But unless we are responsible for the way we change our characters, we are not responsible for the character that results.

### Part III: What If We Have No Free Will?

**Some responses:**

- A. Our successes and accomplishments, virtues and vices, are not "up to us," but many of our life hopes – to become a successful actor, dancer, writer, entrepreneur, to be admired by others – that give meaning to our lives would not be undermined (74).
  - "[I]f we make the appropriate voluntary efforts, there is a good chance that nothing will prevent us from realizing our cherished goals" (74).
- B. We would give up a retribution theory of punishment (according to which people are punished because they *deserve* ill treatment) and embrace a deterrence model of punishment (what justifies punishment is that it deters people from committing crimes) and/or a reformative or rehabilitative model of punishment (punishment is not punishment as such, but a means of remaking criminals into productive members of society).
- C. We would have to give up praise and blame, but other emotions would still be perfectly acceptable, like admiration, disgust, gratitude, *etc.*
  - a. **Question:** How does our lacking free will affect our personal relationships? Would the value of a person's love for you be deflated if you came to believe the person was determined to love you by heredity and environment?
  - b. **Response:** Yes, because we want to be loved of people's free will.
  - c. **Reply:** But the paradigmatic cases of love – parental love and romantic love – occur without the participation of the will – there is no choice involved – and are not the worse for that; indeed, these are cases of the purest forms of love.
- D. "Some people might become more human and understanding in their treatment of others knowing that no one was ultimately responsible" (78)
- E. Society would crumble without the illusion of free will (78).