

Okay, the basic problem of free will comes down to the notion of moral responsibility. We think of people as morally responsible for what they do freely. We don't blame them for what they're forced to do, or at least we blame them typically a great deal less. Then we will often say they're not free, they have no choice in the matter. So that's a very commonsensical way of thinking about things. You can only be morally responsible for what you do freely, of your own choice.

But then, with the rise of science, it becomes more and more plausible to see ourselves as causally determined; that what we do actually has underlying causes in our brains, etc., but such that a being who knew everything about us would be able to predict in advance exactly what we were going to do. Well, if what I do is causally necessary, can I properly be blamed for that? Am I, in effect, not free if I'm determined? So determinism is the thesis that all events are determined by prior causes. So, take any event, let's call it *e*. Given the causal laws that govern the universe, whatever they are, given the prior state of the world, the state of everything in the world before he occurred, then *e* was inevitable. That's one way of understanding the notion of determinism.

So here's a quotation from Hume's inquiry: "It is agreed that matter in all its operations is actuated by a necessary force, and that every natural effect is so precisely determined by the energy of its cause that no other effect, in such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from it." So Hume there is saying that this is something that philosophers generally agree when it comes to the behavior of physical things, material objects. But Hume wanted to argue that it's also true of human actions, and that is the thesis of universal determinism: that it's true not only of things in the physical world but things in what one might call the moral world, the world of people and actions.

Well, there are a number of different positions here, and it's very important to understand how they fit together. So, first of all, we need to ask: is the thesis that we have genuine free will compatible with determinism? Now, when I say genuine freewill, what I take that to mean is the kind of freewill that is required for moral responsibility. Is that compatible with determinism?

Well, some people say no, some people say yes. If you say no, then you're an incompatibilist, and it follows that only one of the two theses can be true, of course, neither of them might be. But that most one of them can be. So, those who say that we do have free will of the morally significant kind, but determinism is false, they are called libertarians. So, if you hear the word libertarian in the context of the freewill debate, that's what it means: someone who thinks that free will is incompatible with determinism, but we do have free will, and that therefore determinism is false. On the other side, you get hard determinists.

A hard determinist is someone who says everything is determined, and it follows from that that we are not free, that we don't have morally significant freedom. So, that's one side of the debate. Now, you might think of the libertarians and hard determinists as being fundamentally opposed, but actually, in some ways, their positions are quite close together because they agree on the conceptual point that determinism and freedom are incompatible. And that's a pretty fundamental agreement between them. They simply disagree on, as it were, facts of the matter, whether determinism is true or not.

So, on the other side of the debate are compatibilists, and compatibilists say that we can have free will even if determinism is true. Determinism and free will are compatible. Now, you can be a compatibilist without being a determinist. You can, that, I am probably falling into that position myself. I think free will and determinism are compatible, but actually I don't believe in determinism because of things to do with modern physics. But those who take a compatibilist position and are determinists, which is certainly the vast majority of compatibilists down the ages, they are called soft determinists.

Now, the consequent argument is a very well-known argument, particularly pushed by Peter van Inwagen, an argument for the claim that determinism is incompatible with free will. Then, it goes like this: if determinism is true, then all human actions are causally determined consequences of the laws of nature and prior conditions. That's just what determinism says. Hence, I cannot do otherwise than I actually do, except by falsifying the laws of nature or changing past conditions. If what I do inevitably comes about given those initial conditions and given the laws, then the only way I could do something different is by changing the prior conditions, which obviously I can't. They're past, they're gone. Or by changing the laws, and I clearly can't do that either. But if I can't do otherwise than I actually do, then I don't have free will. So, if determinism is true, we lack free will.

I've given it there in a very sketchy form. Of course, it can be filled out in various ways, but it looks quite a persuasive argument. The fundamental thrust of it is that if everything I do was, as it were, inevitable from before I was born, how can I possibly be said to be free? There's nothing I could have done differently.

Well, the traditional way of opposing this kind of argument, not just the consequent argument in its modern formulations, but generally the idea that freewill is incompatible with determinism, on the ground that I couldn't do otherwise if determinism is true, the standard way is to interpret "I could do otherwise" or "I couldn't do otherwise" differently. So, being a compatibilist means saying that I can only be said to be able to do otherwise if it's causally possible in that exact situation for me to do otherwise. So, being an incompatibilist wants to say that I'm only really free if, put in that exact situation with the state of my brain and everything being exactly what it was, something different could have happened; otherwise, I cannot be said to be able to do otherwise.

Now, the compatibilist will take a quite different view. The compatibilist will prefer something like this: it would be possible for me to do otherwise in a similar but not identical situation in which I chose to do so. So, the compatibilist says, well, I chose ice cream rather than fruit. It was a free choice, I could have done otherwise. I could have chosen fruit. Of course, in that situation where I had a preference for ice cream, it was inevitable that I was going to choose the ice cream, sure. But had I preferred the fruit, I would have taken the fruit. So, I was entirely free to do as I chose. So, that's a very different reading of "could do otherwise".

Now, Harry Frankfurt has argued that, quite apart from this issue of interpretation, freedom doesn't even require the possibility of doing otherwise in either of these senses. So, that's a rather more radical way of opposing the incompatibility position. So, here's an example: suppose I go through door A, maybe I'm in need to get out of the building, maybe there's some emergency or something like that, and there are two doors, door A and door B. I choose to go

through door A. Now, that is a free action. I freely chose door A rather than door B. But, suppose in fact door B is locked, suppose in fact, had I tried door B, I would have found I couldn't go that way and had to go through door A anyway. In that case, we have an example where, in a sense, I had no choice. It was inevitable that I would go through door A. I couldn't do otherwise. But yet, in the circumstances where I chose to do door A, remaining completely ignorant about the state of door B, it seems plausible to say that I've done it freely. So, therefore, it's possible to do something freely even when you couldn't have done otherwise. And this illustrates that what makes an action inevitable doesn't always bring it about. What makes this action inevitable is that door B is locked, so in those circumstances, it was inevitable I was going to go through door A rather than B. But door B being locked didn't actually bring it about that I went through door A. And Frankfurt gives some other examples.

The usual kind of mad scientist crops up, somebody who is able to predict in advance what I'm going to choose, and this person decides that if I choose to do what he doesn't want me to do, then he's going to interfere with my brain in some clever way and make sure that I actually do what he wants. Now, suppose, in those circumstances, I actually freely do what he wants me to do anyway. In that case, he doesn't have to take any action, I do what I do freely. But, in fact, I couldn't have done otherwise. I couldn't have done otherwise because he would have intervened. Well, there's a lot of interesting discussion about these cases. I mean, just to make one obvious objection, one can say, "Well, okay, maybe it was inevitable that I went through door A rather than B, but I did actually have a choice. I could have done otherwise. I could have tried door B before going through door A, and that would be doing otherwise than I did." In the case of the evil scientist, I could have embarked on the course of thought that would have led me to action B, in which case he would have intervened. But that would have been me doing otherwise than I did, which was quite freely to choose A. So, the argument, as you can imagine, can get quite complex.

Well, a couple of times in talking about freedom, the word "choice" has naturally appeared. I've been talking about choosing one thing rather than another, choosing freely, and so on. And I suspect that this close connection between freedom and choice lies behind the intuition, the natural thought, that to be free, it has to be possible for you to do otherwise. In cases like the Frankfurt examples with door A and door B, you can see that I do make a choice. I choose to go through door A, though in another sense, I don't have a choice. I don't have a choice which door to go through because, in fact, door A is the only one that I could go through. So, you can see that there are subtle nuances here in the notion of choice. The notion of choice is also slippery in other ways. Suppose, for example, I'm walking along the road, my phone goes, I pull it out of my pocket, and then some apparently agitated guy comes up to me with a gun, holds the gun to me, and says, "Give me your mobile phone, or I'll shoot you, right?" Do I have a choice? A case where it's absolutely blindingly obvious what I'm going to do. I'm going to give him the mobile phone. You could say, it's tempting to say, I don't have a choice. On the other hand, you can see that there's a sense in which I do have a choice. I could, if I thought he was bluffing, or I thought his gun was just a replica gun or something like that, or if I felt suicidal, I could refuse to give him the phone. So, there's a sense in which I have a choice, a sense in which I don't. Suppose we're having some brawl, perhaps in some laboratory where I'm wired up, and some clever neuropsychologist is deliberately putting me in a situation where I get very angry. He's able to look at the brain scans and say, "Millikan's going to hit him." Suppose he can, suppose he can predict that. Does it mean I don't have a choice? Well, you could say, in a sense, maybe it does, but in another sense, it doesn't. Maybe the neuropsychologist can say, "Ah, Millikan's going to choose to hit him." In which case, he's predicting that I will choose. Well, doesn't that mean that I do have a choice? So, the notion is very slippery. It's very easy for the word "choice" to be bandied about in these discussions with no clear concept of choice in play. So, be very wary



when you come across discussions in the free will debate. Do not allow words like "choice" to be used without clarification of exactly what is meant by it.

So, let's distinguish various ways in which one might interpret or various things that one might intend in saying "I had no choice." Well, one could mean that what happened was in no way dependent on my decisions or actions. One could mean that my actions were physically forced on me. I had no choice but to open the door. He was holding my hand and forcing it. One could mean that my actions were predetermined in some way by non-factors, perhaps drugs, perhaps brainwashing. One could mean that my actions were predetermined by my own desires and consequent reasoning. Now, that's a very odd sense. Have I had no choice if, in fact, what I do is determined by my own desires and reasoning? I work out what I want to do, I work out how to achieve what I want, and then I make the decision based on those preferences and that reasoning. It's very odd to say there that I had no choice. But you will find that some people will say that. Finally, it might mean it was blindingly obvious what I should do. I suppose in the first round of the FA Cup, say, Manchester United are playing some very weak team that amazingly has managed to get through. And you might say, it was no contest, 20-nil. You don't actually mean it was no contest, you mean it wasn't a meaningful contest. In the same way, sometimes it can be so obvious what to do, as in the case of the mobile phone and the gun, that we say, "I had no choice." Actually, what we mean is, "I had a blindingly obvious choice."

Now, an argument that can be brought to bear here, I think quite powerfully, is called the paradigm case argument. This is an argument that was extremely popular in the heyday of Oxford ordinary language philosophy. It's far less popular now, but I think, in this particular case, it has very considerable force. Let's ask what we mean by a choice. How do we learn the use of the word choice? Well, a typical example might be, as a child, your mother offers you a choice of puddings – ice cream, cake, fruit – which would you like? You make a choice. That's how we learn the meaning of the word. Then, we get the notion of choice from. Now, if that's right, if that's as it were, a paradigm case, a standard example of choice, the kind of case that we use to learn the meaning of the word, then how can it possibly be said that, in such a circumstance, we don't have a choice? It's very peculiar to say that. Now, all this does is sort out meanings of words. Anyone who claims that this kind of argument can settle deep philosophical issues is probably deluding themselves. So, my aim here is just to say it isn't, or at least to suggest that it's an abuse of the word "choice" if you deny that that kind of circumstance involves a choice. You're detaching your use of the word "choice" from its normal meaning so far that it's hard to use it and keep any grip on what we mean by it.