Recall the (classical) compatibilist analysis of "acting freely"

> You did X freely if
> (a) you did X,
> (b) X is what you wanted/chose to do, and
> **(c) if you had wanted/chosen to do something other than X you would have done it.**

Two key virtues of the classical compatibilist position:

(1) Their analysis seems to do a good job classifying cases of *unfree* action.

> (i) If you're in prison, you're not free: you couldn't leave if you wanted to.
> (ii) If someone coerces you with severe enough limitations (death) you're not free: you couldn't have done anything else even if you wanted to, since you'd be dead.
> (iii) If someone manipulates you (say, drugs you into performing some action) you aren't free: if you had desired to do other than what you were drugged into doing you might still act the way the drug forces you to.

(2) The analysis also allows *free will to be compatible with determinism*.

> Are you free to, say, choose what to eat for lunch? Determinism says you *will* choose one thing and you couldn't do anything else consistent with the way things are now and our physical laws. But according to the classical compatibilist this doesn't matter. You'll choose one thing to eat for lunch freely if *were you to have* other desires than those you will actually have, you would eat something different. And that still seems like it could be true regardless of how things *actually* are.

Consequence Argument for Incompatibilism

Enter the incompatibilist. Remember,

Incompatibilism: genuine free will cannot exist if determinism is true.

> ### The Consequence Argument
> (1) What happens next is a necessary consequence of the past and the laws of nature.
> (2) I can't change the past.
> (3) I can't change the laws of nature.
> (4) I can't change the fact that what happens next is a necessary consequence of the past and the laws of nature.
> _____
> (5) I can't change what happens next.

(1) is just a straightforward consequence of determinism. That means we can't deny it to refute what the argument is trying to establish: incompatibilism.

The classical compatibilist, however, sometimes claims that the force of the argument turns on a misunderstanding of the expression "I can't change...". According to them,

I can do X = If I were to want/choose to do X, I would

So "I can't do X" should be analyzed as follows:

I can't do X = If I were to want/chose to do X, I wouldn't.

Let's look at the argument with this analysis executed
(replace every occurrence of "I can't do X" in the Consequence Argument with its analysis) :

(1') [stays the same]
(2') If I were to want to change the past, I wouldn't.
(3') If I were to want to change the laws of nature, I wouldn't.
(4') If I were to want to change the fact that what happens next is a necessary consequence of
        the past and the laws of nature, I wouldn't change that fact.
(5') If I were to want to change what happens next, I wouldn't.

(2'), (3') and (4') still seem true. But (5') seems obviously false! Where's the culprit? It turns out that when we lay out he argument this way, we can see that it is *invalid*. There is a tacit premise:

(β) If I can't change X and that Y necessarily follows from X, then I can't change Y either.

Let's replace "can't change..." with its analysis in *that* rule too, and see what the claim looks like. It gets long...

(β') If both (i) and (ii) are true...
                (i) if I were to want to change X, then I wouldn't, and
                (ii) if I were to want to change that Y necessarily followed from X, then I
                        wouldn't have,
            ...*then* it would follow that if I were to want to change Y, I wouldn't.

This looks like a false principle. To see this just plug in "the past" for X and "the future" for Y. That might make it seem like things are looking good for the compatibilist.

But the incompatibilist often claims there's something fishy going on here. (β) seems true. Doesn't this just show the analysis is a bad one? Often at this point we're left at a stalemate. Compatibilists claim their analysis is more intuitive than (β). Incompabilists claim (β) is more intuitive than the compatibilist analysis. What can we do to settle the tie?