

Skepticism about Free Will

Hard Determinism: Incompatibilism is true (free will is incompatible with determinism) and determinism is true, so we don't have free will.

This is a version of...

Skepticism (about free will): we don't have free will.

Note: all hard determinists are skeptics about free will. Not all skeptics about free will are hard determinists. Galen Strawson (mentioned in the reading) is an example: he thinks we don't have free will, but he has no opinions about whether determinism is true.

Three routes to skepticism:

(A) Incompatibilism + Determinism

First argue for Incompatibilism (using, say, the Consequence Argument). Then check with the scientists to make sure determinism is true.

(B) Failures of Compatibilism and Libertarianism

Argue that compatibilism fails because the extent to which an action is determined by past events does not contribute to, and in fact *hinders*, the action's being free. Then argue that Libertarianism fails because the extent to which an action is *undetermined* by past events does not contribute to, and in fact *hinders*, the action's being free. Since every action is a combination of being determined and undetermined by past events, all actions are unfree.

(C) Regress arguments

Philosophers like Galen Strawson have claimed that the kind of freedom that we think we have requires us to be *ultimately* responsible for our actions in a way that turns out to be impossible. In particular, suppose you think:

You aren't responsible for any action or event E unless there is some prior action or event E' that helped bring E about (i.e. E wasn't purely random) and you are also responsible for E'.

This threatens to generate a *regress*. If you are responsible for your action A, it wasn't random and something prior brought it about—let's call it E—that you are responsible for. But you're not responsible for E unless *it* wasn't random and something else prior brought *it* about. Let's call that E'. And you're not responsible for *that* unless you're responsible for some E"...etc.

Hard Determinism and Skepticism: Living without Freedom

What if we don't have free will? What would follow? It seems:

(A) We should never take pride in anything we had done or think anyone deserved a reward.

That might not be *too* bad. But also:

(B) We should never feel guilty and no one is ever blameworthy for the bad things they do.

This raises worries because many people believe...

The *retributive theory of punishment*: you can only ever punish someone if they *deserve* it.

Nobody deserves anything if we don't have free will. So can we never punish anyone? But skeptics have a fascinating reply: The retributive theory of punishment is wrong. We can still keep a conception of punishment as a form of deterrence, avoidance, or a means of reshaping behavior. This is like "quarantining" very sick individuals.

Recap

