

СВОБОДНА ВОЛЯ, ДЕТЕРМИНИЗЪМ, ЛИБЕРТАРИАНСТВО И АВСТРИЙСКАТА ИКОНОМИКА

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Резюме: В тази статия се изразява твърдението, че позицията на свободната воля е правилна, а тази на детерминизма е неправилна, и че либертарианството и австрийската икономика са съвместими с първо споменатата, но не и с последната позиция.

Ключови думи: свободна воля; детерминизъм; либертарианството

JEL категории: B, Z

FREE WILL, DETERMINISM, LIBERTARIANISM AND AUSTRIAN ECONOMICS

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Abstract: This paper makes the claim that the free will position is correct, that of determinism incorrect, and that libertarianism and Austrian economics are compatible with the former but not the latter.

Key words: Free will; determinism; libertarianism

JEL category: B, Z

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I. Introduction

Determinism is the view that since everything has a cause, this applies to human action as well. This implies that people are not free to choose.² Their supposed choices are actually caused by historical events, including the makeup of their brains. In this view, free choices are a will o the wisp; seemingly, we have them, but, actually they are a mirage. We are not really free to engage in acts other than the ones we actually undertake.

Free will takes the diametric opposite position. It maintains that we could have acted other than we actually did. Yes, there are causal connections in life, in chemistry, in physics, and some of what occurs to us is completely causal and apart from our will,³ there are some that are only partially under our control,⁴ but there are at least some actions over which we have complete control.

It is the thesis of the present paper that determinism is a false doctrine,⁵ and that free will is correct. Further, I shall maintain that the latter is compatible with libertarianism but the former is not. In section II we consider a mental experiment illustrative of the free will perspective. In section III we consider some other failures of determinism. Section IV is devoted to considering, and refuting, deterministic objections to the free will positions

II. A mental experiment

Scenario 1: Joe is asked to choose between an apple and a banana. He chooses the apple.

Scenario 2: Under gunpoint, Joe is compelled to choose between these two fruits. However, if he chooses the banana he will be shot. He chooses the apple.

For the free will advocate there is a world of difference between the two cases: one is freely chosen, the other is chosen under duress. For the determinist there is no difference: both choices are caused, albeit by different preliminary events. This is a

¹ The author thanks Michael Edelstein, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, Stephan Kinsella and Robert Wenzel for help in the writing of this article. Of course the usual caveats always apply.

² Mozes (undated A) defines this as “holding that at any time there is exactly one possible action consistent with the operation of the laws of nature, and so there is no choice among alternatives.”

³ Bodily functions such as heart beat, kidney function, etc.

⁴ Some people are addicted to various substances, and have great difficulty in overcoming them

⁵ Two of the major proponents of this erroneous viewpoint are Dennett, 2003 and Harris, 2012. For devastating critiques of these authors see Mozes, 2013, undated A, undated B. For splendid defenses of free will in general see Thomas 2014, Author unknown, 1995 and Hoppe, 2011, 2015

reductio ad absurdum.⁶ The word “compulsion” is shorn of its usual meaning; indeed, of any meaning at all. The first case is clearly an example of free will; the second, compulsion

Scenario 3: Joe shoots an innocent person to death. He is caught and sentenced to punishment. He says at his sentencing, “But, I’m a determinist. I had no choice. Given historical and biological and other such causal events, I *had* to shoot that person. I *could not* have done otherwise than I did.” The defendant’s case is invalid. But the determinist would agree with this murderer. The determinist, as a so-called libertarian, might well still support using violence to prevent him from doing so again. However, if we stipulate, *arguendo*, that this criminal will never ever murder anyone else, or, indeed, not violate any aspect of the non-aggression principle (NAP) again, the determinist’s position implies we should let this individual go; that he is not blameworthy. The determinist’s position is thus forward looking. In contrast, from the free will libertarian position, it is only pragmatic or utilitarian to be forward looking in this manner. The true libertarian is backward looking. We don’t care (except for pragmatic or utilitarian considerations) what the future will bring. As deontological libertarians, we care only about what happened previously. Joe committed murder in the past. That and that alone justifies punishing him now. From the deterministic position, there cannot even *be* such a thing as “punishment.” There can only be “taking murderers out of circulation” so that they don’t commit murder in the future. This is similar to the way we would treat an animal or a machine that killed someone. We would not again employ such a machine unless it is fixed. Such an animal would likely be destroyed, since we could not trust it again. The idea of *punishing* such a machine or animal never enters the picture. The idea of *blaming* our human murderer for his despicable action must be set aside by the determinist. He sees men as mere machines or animals. The word “punishment” is emptied of all its meaning for him when a human being is incarcerated. No one can ever be blamed for anything. No one is *guilty* of violating the NAP. They can of course engage in acts incompatible with the NAP, but they cannot logically be guilty of doing so, they cannot logically be blamed for such actions, they cannot logically be punished for them. This is yet another reductio ad absurdum of that position, at least from the libertarian perspective.

The basic premise of the determinist position is that all is caused. If you do not believe this, they charge, you are unscientific. The brain, in particular, is a physical organ, subject to all the cause and effect relationships that apply to any other bit of physical matter. There are no such things as mere “thoughts.” These are just “ghosts in the machine.” No atheist could believe in them. From the free will perspective, this is arrant nonsense.

What about Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle? Does this not mean, particularly at the molecular or electronic level, that there is a break between cause and effect? If so, there is an exception to the cause and effect assumption. What caused the Big Bang? What caused whatever caused the Big Bang? This would appear to be yet another exception to the general rule that all events are caused. Do we not become involved in an infinite regress if we keep pushing back along this chain of

⁶ According to the old aphorism, if you cannot tell the difference between the bathroom and the living room, you are not welcome in my house. The equivalent in the present context is that if you cannot distinguish between a case of compulsion and free choice, then your participation in political economy is unwarranted, since this is perhaps the most basic distinction in this field.

supposed causes and effects? If not, if there are indeed exceptions to this rule, why cannot free will be another exception?

Here is another *reductio ad absurdum*: Assume for the moment that the universe started with the Big Bang. There was nothing before that. This means that all of the subsequent history of the earth and all its inhabitants (to say nothing of the rest of the universe) was completely determined some 16 billions of years ago. We had to have slavery, Naziism, Communism; this was foreordained by a cause and effect nexus. Yes, these institutions came about because of the thoughts, purposes, intentions of people, among other causal agents, but these too are part and parcel of the causal chain. Matters could not possibly have turned out otherwise, in any of these regards. The subjective feeling that we are free to choose an apple or a banana, or slavery, Naziism, Communism versus freedom, is an illusion. We are not really free in that way. We are all determined to choose in whatever way we actually do choose. That any rational person could adhere to such beliefs is highly problematic.

States Hoppe (2015, footnotes deleted) in this regard:

“It is possible to describe and explain man in naturalistic terms, in the same way as we describe and explain stones, plants and animals: in the language of physics, chemistry, biology, genetics, neurology, etc.

“But a purely naturalistic account of man, while entirely legitimate, and even if true, must fail to capture the essence of man: what makes man unique and distinguishes him from all other things: from stones, plants and animals. That this is the case can be easily recognized in asking oneself what it is that one is doing when debating the question at hand - the nature of man - or any other question for that matter. The answer: We speak to each other in meaningful words and sentences - we present arguments - and we do so with the purpose of argumentative success, of reaching agreement regarding the validity of an argument or the truth of some proposition. Yet it is obviously impossible to give a naturalistic account of this undeniable part of human nature: of meaningful words, sentences and arguments, of intention and purpose, of truth and falsehood, and of success and failure. There is nothing purposeful, meaningful, true, false, successful or unsuccessful in nature. Nature and the laws of nature are what they are and they work the way they do, unchangingly and unfailingly. Yet human propositions or sentences are intentional, meaningful, and true or false, i.e., all meaning and all truths are in a most fundamental sense meaning-and-truths-for-man rather than meaning-and-truths-an-sich.

“Hence, every natural scientist - whether biologist, physiologist, chemist, geneticist or neurologist -, who claims that man can be reduced to nothing but nature becomes entangled in contradiction.

“On the one hand, the 'man' this scientist speaks and writes about: man-as-nature (which he claims to be the only 'man' there is), has no purpose and no meaning and nothing about its inner workings is true or false, successful or failing. Everything works the way it does, in accordance with unchanging and unfailing causal laws. Even life and death have no meaning. Death and bodily decay do not falsify causal laws. Nor does life confirm these laws. The same laws of nature hold for life and death equally. Life and death are not a "success" or "failure," as far as man-as-nature is concerned. They simply are: morally (valuation-ally) "neutral" events. And yet: On

the other hand, he, the very scientist, who obviously counts himself as a member of the class of 'man,' follows a purpose in conducting his research on man-as-nature. He conducts purposeful operations and must employ meaningful sentences to describe the results of his research concerning "an-sich" meaningless natural materials and processes. He claims these results to be true rather than false. And given his purpose, he considers his research a success or a failure. And for him, in contrast to man-as-nature, death and bodily mal-functions do have meaning and are indeed failures and mal-functions. Yet they have meaning and are failures or mal-functions only insofar as they are related to a human purpose: the purpose of wanting to preserve life and health (as something "good") and to prevent illness and death (as something "bad").

“Instead of a necessarily insufficient and incomplete ‘naturalistic’ account, then, I want to present what one might call a cultural(istic) account of man, which captures what the naturalistic account leaves out and thus elucidates what distinguishes man from everything else.

“Whatever merits these and similar works may otherwise have, philosophically they are fundamentally mistaken and hence represent ‘bad’ philosophy. They are all characterized by a complete lack of self-reflection by the authors on their own purposeful practice as scientist and their own claim of saying and writing something that is true rather than false (all the while purposes and true or false materials or processes do not exist in nature).”

III. Other problems

Another difficulty for the determinist philosophy is that it runs counter to Austrian economics. One of the key elements of this school of the dismal science is methodological dualism: that a different perspective must be brought to bear in the study of human action, on the one hand, and the physical world, on the other. Since under determinism man is merely in effect a machine, contrary to Austrianism, there is a need for a separate method to study these two very difference aspects of reality.

What is methodological dualism? It can be defined in this way (source: http://wiki.mises.org/wiki/Methodological_dualism; footnotes omitted):

“**Methodological dualism** is an [epistemological](#) position which holds that it is necessary, based on our current levels of knowledge and understanding, to utilize a different methodology in our attempts to analyze the actions of human beings than the methodology used in the physical sciences (i.e. physics, biology etc...) to study external events. This position is based on the presupposition that humans differ fundamentally from other objects in the external world in that humans act, or in other words use means to achieve ends, while other objects in nature, such as stones, planets, molecules and atoms do not. Furthermore, we do not at present know how external events affect an individual's ‘thoughts, ideas, and judgements of value’ and this ignorance forces us to adopt a dualistic approach to the two classes of phenomena.

“This view was emphasized by [Ludwig von Mises](#) and formed the central basis of his epistemology. Methodological dualism, especially in Mises's case, was a reaction to the notion held by groups such as the [logical positivists](#) that the study of

human action, and as such economics, should utilize the same experimental scientific method as the physical sciences, a view that has been referred to by Mises, [Friedrich Hayek](#) and others as [scientism](#). The alternative methodology that Mises developed and utilized for his study of human action was [praxeology](#), which formed the basis for his work in economics. Praxeology differs from the mainstream neoclassical approach to economics, in that the mainstream approach utilizes the same overall methodology as the physical sciences in an attempt to develop economic theories and predict future economic.”

It is difficult to overemphasize the importance of this point. If determinism is correct, and there is no such thing as free will, then human beings cannot have any goals, purposes, intentions, mens rea, guilty consciences, etc., any more than machines can have them. This is because, at bottom, men are no more than machines, automatons.

Without mens rea, libertarianism, too, goes by the boards. This philosophy is impossible since it holds criminals guilty of crimes against the non-aggression principle (NAP) and there can be no such thing as guilt for a mere machine.

AU (1995): “Imagine we are at a murder trial. Randy Smith is accused of killing his Aunt Millie. The defense admits that on the night of the murder, Smith had an argument with his Aunt, that he took a pistol out of his jacket and shot her. She died of the gunshot wound. Smith knew that the gun was loaded, that Millie was directly in front of it, and that he was pulling the trigger. He was not insane at the time, there were no abnormal chemicals in his brain, and he was not acting in self-defense. He killed her knowingly, intentionally, and unjustifiably.

“Nevertheless, Smith maintains, he cannot be held responsible for his action, because, in the strongest sense, he could not help it. It was, he says, *physically impossible* for him to avoid shooting his Aunt. He argues: ‘Physics teaches us that all physical changes transpire in accordance with the laws of nature. Now my firing of the gun, along with my aunt's ensuing death, were physical events. So, if the dictates of science are to be accepted, these events were ultimately the outcome of events occurring in (say) 2 million B.C., together with the laws of nature. But it is not up to me what went on 2 million years ago. And it is not up to me what the laws of nature are either. Therefore, the consequences of these things, including my present actions, are not up to me either.’

Continues AU (1995): “Smith's action was caused (say) by his anger at his aunt; however, it remained possible for Smith not to shoot his aunt, because he could have not been so controlled by his anger. Many other people who get angry do not kill anybody; they have cultivated rational character traits, which they act on. Smith, too, could have chosen to act from more reasonable motives, and then he would not have killed Millie. For example, he could have thought about the consequences of shooting Millie, realized that these would be harmful, and acted accordingly. Thus, he could have chosen different causes for his actions.”

IV. Objections

1. Hawking and Mlodinow (2010, 32) ask:

“Do people have free will? If we have free will, where in the evolutionary tree did it develop? Do blue-green algae or bacteria have free will, or is their behavior automatic and within the realm of scientific law? Is it only multicelled organisms that have free will, or only mammals? We might think that a chimpanzee is exercising free will when it chooses to chomp on a banana, or a cat when it rips up your sofa, but what about the roundworm called Caenorhabditis elegans—a simple creature made of only 959 cells? It probably never thinks, ‘That was damn tasty bacteria I got to dine on back there,’ yet it too has a definite preference in food and will either settle for an unattractive meal or go foraging for something better, depending on recent experience. Is that the exercise of free will?”

“Though we feel that we can choose what we do, our understanding of the molecular basis of biology shows that biological processes are governed by the laws of physics and chemistry and therefore are as determined as the orbits of the planets. Recent experiments in neuroscience support the view that it is our physical brain, following the known laws of science, that determines our actions, and not some agency that exists outside those laws. For example, a study of patients undergoing awake brain surgery found that by electrically stimulating the appropriate regions of the brain, one could create in the patient the desire to move the hand, arm, or foot, or to move the lips and talk. It is hard to imagine how free will can operate if our behavior is determined by physical law, so it seems that we are no more than biological machines and that free will is just an illusion.”

Response 1.

There are difficulties in these objections. First of all, just because we are unable to pinpoint, exactly, “where in the evolutionary tree did (free will) develop” does not mean it did not come into being, nor that it does not exist. There is, after all, such a thing as a continuum (Block and Barnett, 2008). There is no sharp distinction between any of the colors of the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. It is only arbitrary to say that on this point of the spectrum is found red, and here, orange. No, they blend into one another. So is it the case with regard to the continuum between free will bearing humans on the one hand, and rocks and planets, or the Caenorhabditis elegans, on the other. Perhaps it starts with mammals, as just a guess. Nor are matters so simple as even this. For members of the homo sapien category do not have free will 100% of the time. When a person gets off his chair to go for a walk, and he is completely unaware of which foot he puts forward first. His heart, kidneys operate and other bodily organs and processes operate entirely without any volition on his part. He may even be unaware of whether he chose the proverbial apple or not. So, even for humans, at the top of the food chain, many or perhaps even most decisions are made deterministically. But there are some: should I propose to this woman or not?; should I go to this university or that one or seek employment, etc., most certainly are volitional. People choose one path or the other, and they were free, beforehand, to have made an alternative choice. Let us say, for illustration purposes, that humans engage in their freedom to choose 10% of the time, that chimpanzees are volitional in 8% of their actions, other, lesser, mammals, on 6% of relevant occasions, and our brother the Caenorhabditis elegans, in .000000001 % of its options. That is to say, perhaps even the most humble species can enjoy free will on some few percentage of occasions, while even we relatively exalted humans do not

do so all of the time. That might be the best rejoinder to this particular objection of Hawking and Mlodinow. Note, we are staking out a moderate position in our support for free will: determinism is sometimes correct in human action, but not always.

But what of their evidence from the “recent experiments in neuroscience? This only demonstrates that *some* of the time, *some* semi-conscious persons can be manipulated in this manner, for *some* very elementary decisions. These authors conclude from this that there is no such thing as free will for *anyone*, at *any time*. This would appear to be a rather serious over generalization based on rather limited evidence, that does not support this conclusion in any case. But, suppose, contrary to fact conditional coming up, that one day, in the far future, these neuroscientists will be able to expand their repertoire: they will be able to manipulate all people in this manner in all cases, important and unimportant. In effect, some sort of high tech voodoo or mind control or hypnosis will become effective. Then, and only then, may we properly say that free will has been banished from the planet? No. For there would still be these neuroscientists themselves who would retain free will, and this goes as well for others who are not trapped in their nefarious machines and machinations.

Mosez’s reaction to this objection is definitive. He states (undated A, footnotes removed):

“Benjamin Libet performed a series of experiments in the early 1980s, in which subjects were asked to occasionally move their hands at arbitrary intervals, and to note and report the time in which they made the decision to move their hand; an EEG measurement, taken during the experiment, showed that the brain waves preceding the hand movement started some fraction of a second before the time the subjects reported as the time they made the decision. Several other researchers have since conducted similar experiments, all following the same pattern: the subject is asked to make some arbitrary decision, and to note and report the time at which he made the decision; and either EEG or fMRI measurements detect the brain activity containing information about the decision some time before the subject reported making it. These results have been trumpeted by some as proof of determinism, demonstrating that decisions we apparently make by our free will are actually the result of neural processes that occur before we become conscious of the decision...

“The Libet experiments in fact do not have any interesting implications regarding free will, for two basic reasons. First, the experiments created a situation in which the subject's decision (at what time to move his hand) is necessarily arbitrary; there is no possible reason for the subject to move his hand at one time rather than another. The same is true for all the later experiments that found similar results; all involve asking the subject to make a decision without any reason to decide on one alternative rather than another. Such situations are fundamentally different from actual real-life situations in which people make decisions, and it seems likely that that difference would completely change how free will operates. Even if these experiments proved anything about the decision-making process in the laboratory situations they created – situations in which a decision is completely arbitrary, with no reasons – it would be impossible to draw any conclusions from that about the decision-making process in real-life situations, in which a person makes a decision by considering reasons for and against a course of action.

“Second, the Libet experiments don't prove anything even about the decision-making process in the laboratory situation they created; both the determinist

interpretation of the experiments and Libet's own interpretation ignore the fact that perception takes time. Libet asked subjects to report the time at which they decided to move their hands, with accuracy down to a fraction of a second, by watching a clock-face with a fast-moving dot, and noting the position of the dot at the moment they made the decision. But the perception of the clock-face – like all visual perception – is a process that takes time; it is therefore likely that the dot position reported by the subjects was the position, not at the moment they became conscious of the decision, but some fraction of a second later. Furthermore, generally when we intentionally perform a movement, we monitor that movement with our vision; and so our visual processes when intentionally performing a movement (such as the hand-movement performed in the experiment) will naturally be alert to the moment at which the movement occurs, which will be some fraction of a second after the movement is consciously initiated; this again makes it likely that the dot's position on the clock-face, perceived by the subject as being at the same time he became conscious of the decision, was in fact at a time some fraction of a second later. The same problem applies to all but one of the later experiments: all these experiments relied on visual cues to help the subjects note when they made their conscious decision, and it is very likely therefore that the time reported by the subjects was some fraction of a second later than the time they actually became conscious of their decision. (The only exception is one experiment in which the delay measured was several seconds, which cannot be explained by delay in perception. This experiment was similar to all the other ones in that the subjects were asked to make an arbitrary decision with no reasons, and so the previous point still fully applies.)”

2. Hidden assumption

Now consider this critique: “I believe in your argument you have a hidden assumption of free will, you write: ‘The word "compulsion" is shorn of its usual meaning. In my view, the first case is an example of free will; the second was one of compulsion. Why can't choices in both cases be considered different types of cases resolved because of determinism?’

“Case 1: Why can't deterministic choices result without an attempt by anyone to force a particular choice? That is if we must choose on our own, without coercion, between eating spaghetti and meatballs versus pizza, couldn't we say our deterministic emergence will cause us all to choose spaghetti and meatballs?

“Case 2: Someone with a gun is causing us to make a choice we wouldn't have made without the coercion. Wouldn't the choice upon us then be influenced by our deterministic nature, namely the desire not to be killed or injured?”

Response 2.

There are difficulties here. With regard to case one, yes, this is correct. But only sometimes. That is, upon occasion we will pick one food over another without even thinking about it. No conscious choice, or not much of one, is made. Perhaps we grab whichever dish is closest almost instinctively or automatically. If there is any free will in this scenario, there is not much of it. But this does not *always* occur. Sometimes, more so for some than for others, the decision between the two meals is made very deliberately. Here, free will rides to the fore. What about the choice

between pizza and mud. Would we not all, without exception, decide upon the former? Not necessarily. If we want to make ourselves sick for some purpose or other... A similar analysis applies to case two. Almost always we will be influenced by the gunman. Most of us, virtually always, have a strong desire not to be shot. But there are exceptions. For example, if the criminal is asking where our children are, so that he can kill them, many of us would rather die than give up this information.

A more basic reason for rejecting this criticism is that it makes free will out to be something akin to any other causal agent. But it is not. It is unique. It is sui generis. It does not fit in any causal chain. Human beings, most of the time if they wish it, are able to break into the causal chain and obviate what might otherwise be expected from them were this the only relevant consideration. People are quirky. They can override what would otherwise have taken place were determinism always true.

3. von Mises

Mises (1966, 46) states: "The innate and inherited biological qualities and all that life has worked upon him make a man what he is at any instant of his pilgrimage. They are his fate and destiny. His will is not 'free' in the metaphysical sense of the term. It is determined by his background and all the influences to which he himself and all of his ancestors were exposed."

Based on this passage, some defenders of determinism count Mises as a supporter of theirs. And, superficially, it would appear that they have a point. However, this interpretation of the master of Austrian economics turns on the word "metaphysical": we need not have free will in the metaphysical sense in order to more correctly interpret Mises as an advocate of free will

In the very next passage after the one quoted above this author (1966, 46) states as follows (emphasis added): "Inheritance and environment direct a man's actions. They *suggest* to him both the ends and the means." That word "suggest" is crucial. We can deduce from his use of that word that man's "innate and inherited biological qualities" and his biological "inheritance and environment" are far from definitive. They do not completely rule his life. They do not fully determine his choices. Rather, they only *suggest* to him directions in which his decisions will lie. His free will can rule them, not they, him.

Continues Mises (1966, 46) in this vein:

"He does not himself create his ideas and standards of value; he borrows them from other people. His ideology is what his environment enjoins upon him. Only very few men have the gift of thinking new and original ideas and of changing the traditional body of creeds and doctrines.

Common man does not speculate about the great problems. With regard to them he relies upon other people's authority, he behaves as 'every decent fellow must behave,' he is like a sheep in the herd. It is precisely this intellectual inertia that characterizes a man as a common man. Yet the common man does choose. He chooses to adopt traditional patterns or patterns adopted by other people because he is convinced that this procedure is best fitted to achieve his own welfare.

And he is ready to change his ideology and consequently his mode of action whenever he becomes convinced that this would better serve his own interests.”

Here, Mises demonstrates even more clearly he is in the free will camp. Yes, the “ideology (of most people) is what his environment enjoins upon him.” He is like a “sheep.” That sounds very deterministic to be sure. However, there are exceptions, in Mises’s view: “Only very few men have the gift of thinking new and original ideas and of changing the traditional body of creeds and doctrines.” That means, that at least these exceptional men are able to modify, overcome, think for themselves, overturn, accepted opinion. But this author goes even further. *Even the common man* is capable of choosing. *Even the common man* “is ready to change his ideology and consequently his mode of action whenever he becomes convinced that this would better serve his own interests.” It is difficult, in the extreme, to count Mises as a determinist.

Another failed attempt to characterize Mises (1978, 35-36) in this manner stems from this statement of his: "The category of action is the fundamental category of human knowledge. It implies all the categories of logic and the category of regularity and causality." But all this demonstrates is that for this scholar, causal relations were a reality. The only way to interpret this statement as supportive of determinism is to see free will advocates as rejecting causation in its entirety. However, there are no free will supporters who do any such thing.

4. Brains versus thoughts

One way to define determinism is simply to mean that humans, including their brains, consist of physical matter. As such, they are subject to the same laws of causality governing all physical matter. Of this there can be no doubt, but it does not incline one to determinism vis a vis free will in the slightest. Why not? This is because there is all the world of difference between molecules, cells, and other physical matter which make up the brain, on the one hand, and thoughts, which exist in an entirely different realm. Yes, of course, it cannot be denied, we think by use of our brains. If our heads are chopped off, or we have a frontal lobotomy, we can no longer engage in the thinking process. However, these undoubted facts do not give us the warrant to conflate the two very different universes of discourse.

Consider music as an analogy. One way of looking at musical notes is in terms of vibrations of a string. Does a Mozart symphony consist, solely, of string (or wind or percussion) vibrations? From the point of view of physics, this may well be the case. But is this the only way to look at the matter? Hardly. Surely, there is more to Mozart than this physical phenomenon. There is also, to be sure, the beauty of the music. But where, precisely, is the beauty located? One way of answering it is that beauty does not exist anywhere apart from our minds. It is an assessment we bring to the music, not anything inhering in it. And of course for some, Mozart is not exquisite at all. The point is, that just as there is a vital difference between aesthetics and physics, so, too, is there a divergence between effervescent thoughts and brains composed of biological matter. Yet, determinists either cannot see any distinction in

these two separate entities⁷, or they are lying either to themselves and/or to others; they can make this distinction, but refuse to admit it.⁸

5. The Free Will position is incoherent

This criticism is put forth in the form of a syllogism:

Either our will is free or it is not.

1. If our will is free, unaffected by prior events, then human action is random. The result is chaos.

2. If our will is affected by prior events, then it's not free, it's determined by prior events. This is Determinism.

3. If it is somehow *both* free and affected by prior events, then what determines when the effects of free will take over from the effects of prior events? Does the free will have free will to decide? If so, what determines when free will's free will takes over, ad infinitum? This leads to either 1. or 2.

Conclusion: the free will position implies either chaos or determinism.

Response 5.

Let us take each of these points in turn.

First, either our will is free or it is not. If our will is free, unaffected by prior events, then human action is random. The result is chaos.

To the contrary, our will is free, at least for most people on some occasions. It is not true to say that our will is completely unaffected by prior events. Rather, it is indeed effected by prior events, often to a great degree. But, most of us can overcome these influences of prior events. Not every child brought up in the inner city becomes a criminal, even though a disproportionate number do. Some children brought up in good homes, in rich areas, with love, still become vicious lawbreakers. We are free to reject the influence of prior events, at least in the case of most of us.

Second, this critique claims "If our will is affected by prior events, then it's not free, it's determined by prior events. This is determinism."

No. Our will is affected by prior events, but not totally. We can overcome these effects. To say this is no more than to assert common sense, ordinary information possessed by most people. It is only determinists, with a philosophical ax to grind, who doubt this.

Third, in the view of this critic: "If it's somehow both free and affected by prior events, then what determines when the effects of free will take over from the effects of prior events? Does the free will have free will to decide? If so, what determines when free will's free will takes over, ad infinitum? This leads back to either points 1. or 2.

⁷ This is a pity on them. Perhaps they suffer from some form of Asperger's syndrome or autism.

⁸ In which case they are guilty of intellectual malfeasance.

No. What determines when the effects of free will take over from the effects of prior events? It is our will power. Sometimes we do indeed let things slide; we are on automatic pilot, and our history, our physical make up, is decisive. This cannot be denied. But at other times our will and determination overcome these prior events and predilections. What determines this is different for each individual. Some people use psychology, or religion or Alcoholics Anonymous to overcome their impetus to overindulge in booze. Some have great determination and self-control. Others are less fortunate.

Therefore, the conclusion of this critic that the doctrine of free will implies either chaos or determinism is unwarranted. Yet another difficulty with the position of this determinist critic of free will is that he is not seeking the truth. According to the logic of his own position, he is only acting the role of a non-thinking automaton, whose views are solely determined by past events, plus the physical make-up of his brain, etc. Thus, he is not really criticizing the notion of free will. He is just going through the motions, like a puppet on a string.

States AU (1995): “Rand argues that it is not possible consistently to deny that one has free will. Every human choice and every evaluation presupposes it. One cannot deliberate about something, unless one thinks it is within one's power to do it or not do it; one also cannot say that something 'should' or 'shouldn't' be done, unless it is possible for it to be done or not be done. Consequently, if one is deliberating about whether to believe in free will or not, then one is already committed to its existence. Nor can the determinist tell us that we should accept determinism. Nor can he claim that he is advocating determinism because it is true -- since on his view, he is advocating determinism only because some blind factors beyond his control force him to advocate it. Thus, the determinist's position appears to devolve into incoherence, as soon as he tries to assert it.”

Further, “If neuroscientists claim that all behavior is determined, then theirs is as well, as is that of the audience they reach. Here, the complete determinist claims that whatever happens cannot be different than it is, as though we were watching (or carrying out) the unfolding of a movie. If this were true there could be no sense to their advocacies, since whatever occurs could not become different from how it was determined to be.”⁹

According to Mozes (undated A): “Man does not make a directly free choice on what ideas to accept; his freedom is in controlling what facts and arguments his mind focuses on, and this selection of facts and arguments determines what ideas he then accepts as truth. Man does not make a directly free choice on what action to take; his freedom is in controlling what considerations relevant to his decision his mind focuses on, and this selection of facts and considerations determines his actions.”

6. Murder scenario

⁹ This material appeared in a blog written by Stephan Kinsella. There are no truer words written on this topic than these.

Consider the murder scenario 3, *supra*. The textual characterization of determinism therein is distorted; it is a straw man. The murderer could not have done otherwise only in the same sense the free will person could not have done otherwise.

Response 6.

If this is true, then there is no difference in the free will and the determinist views of the murder. In both cases, the murderer was not free to do other than he did. So, according to this objection, there is no difference between the free will and the determinist positions. This is surely wrong-headed. If there is anything that the two schools of thought on this issue agree on, it is that they *differ* on this matter.

7. Murder scenario, continued

Given that this person decided to pull the trigger, then, according to the free will doctrine, he could not have done otherwise than what he did. What his free will dictated to him was a "causal event." It caused him to murder. Therefore, all is determinism. There is no such thing as an uncaused "free will."

Response 7.

This is true. The murderer's decision to carry out his evil act was indeed a "causal event." But this objection does not extend its analysis far back enough into history. It only looks at that point and then forward, from when the murderer decided to pull the trigger. Let us peruse this event a bit earlier, during the time when the murderer was still considering whether or not to perform his abominable deed. *At that time*, according to the free will position, matters could have gone *either way*. The murderer could have chosen to be virtuous and not kill the innocent victim. Unfortunately, in the event, he did commit the murder, but he need not have done so; he could have decided, a few minutes before he actually pulled the trigger, not to do so. According to the determinist position, he was ordained, compelled, required by the forces of history,¹⁰ to pull the trigger. This decision of his was set in stone from 16 billion years ago, when the big bang occurred.

8. Determinism and libertarianism are compatible

Whether free will is a factor in the causal process or prior brain events are the exclusive factors, the necessary and sufficient antecedents were in place for him to commit the murder. Under either assumption the murderer committed the murder (no one else did) and as such is obligated to make restitution and pay penalties.

Response 8.

In the free will perspective, the murderer is guilty because he chose to commit this foul deed, and he could have chosen otherwise. According to the determinist position, the murderer could not have chosen otherwise. Therefore, he can only be punished from a pragmatic - utilitarian point of view, one that looks forward into the

¹⁰ The reference to Marxism is purposeful. Determinism is but a branch of Marxism. According to that misbegotten philosophy, the laws of history will lead us, inexorably, to glorious socialism. There is nothing that any human being can do to thwart this horror. If this is not determinism, then nothing is.

future; we will all be better off if this murderer is in the clink. But, he cannot be punished from a deontological perspective, one that looks to the past. But libertarianism is a deontological enterprise, and therefore no one who upholds the determinist position can be a libertarian.

9. Causal connection

The free will event leading to the pulling of the trigger is simply one antecedent cause in a long series of causes. *Once the supposed free will decision is made* matters could *not* have gone either way. The murder would then necessarily occur. The free will decision is rooted in prior events. Otherwise it is random.

Response 9.

"Rooted" is an interesting word. Of course decisions we freely make are "rooted" in what occurred before. But, we can sometimes override the past, as when the child rejects the alcoholism of his parents, or the adult alcoholic gets back on the wagon. "Random" here would appear to be a scare word. That would appear to mean that the present action is totally divorced from everything in the past. For example, a person thinking of drinking alcohol or not, knowing he shouldn't, instead crows like a chicken? That would be random, I presume. But that is not at all what is meant or implied in the free will position. Rather, it is the claim that the previous alcoholic can (sometimes) override his predilection for another drink. This is exactly what is attempted to be done in psychotherapy. The professional tries to help his clients engage in their free will so as to override tendencies that would otherwise occur. This entire profession is predicated on the notion that clients have free will: the ability to change harmful ingrained habits.

10. Criterion for overriding the past.

When a person's free will overrides the past, what criteria does he use to do so?

Response 10.

This objection misunderstands free will. Free will does not itself "override the past." Rather, free will is the name given to the theory that says that *people* (not free will) can override the past. Here is an analogy. It is not true that "religion" prays, or that "team spirit" applauds the home team. Rather, religious people pray, not religion itself, and sports fans root for the home team, not "team spirit". In similar manner, individual people can override the past, not free will itself.

How do these people do this? Precisely how is a question for psychologists, philosophers, etc. All that can be said is that they do it with an act of will. A child is brought up in the inner city. All around him there are people getting into crime, drugs, etc. It would be easy for him to do so too. If he did so, his family members, friends, neighbors, would all applaud him. But, he chooses not to do so. Instead, he becomes a bookworm, a nerd. Possibly he is beaten up for that choice. Almost certainly, he is denigrated by his family members, friends, neighbors. Yet, he perseveres. It would be far easier for him in some sense to go along with the local crowd, and, perhaps, with

his past (his parents, grandparents, history, local culture). But through a courageous act of will, he transcends all that.

Here is yet another problem with determinism, along these lines. The word "courageous" was mentioned above, in relation to this young man from the inner city. The difficulty with determinism is that in that philosophy there is no, there can be no, such thing as courage. Think of actions we would ordinarily think of as courageous: running into a burning building to save some babies trapped therein. That is a paradigm case of a courageous act. Why? Because every fiber of our being calls out against running into a burning building. We are hard-wired for self-preservation. Our physical brains are set up in such a manner. All of the past, and his physical brain, is yelling at the hero: "Don't be an idiot. Running into a burning building is dangerous. You could get killed, you moron." And, yet, he overrides all this, puts his precious life in danger, and saves the children.

But, under determinism, all is determined by the past. He should get no special credit for heroically saving these children's lives. He *had* to do this. He was compelled, by the past, by his physical being, by his brain, to run into the building to grab up those kids. It is as if someone held a gun to his head and told him, "either you run into that conflagration and save those babies, or I'll blow your head off." Under such circumstances, a lot if not all of the heroic element that would otherwise exist would be tarnished. So, we see yet another objection to determinism. It is perverse. It ruins language. Now, the determinist himself might not think this is any great shakes. Language, schmanguage, he might say. And, were this the only objection against that philosophy, the determinist might have something of a point. But, it constitutes just one more nail in the coffin of this position.

V. Conclusion

According to Hoppe (2011, footnotes removed): "What is this contradiction? If actions could indeed be conceived of as governed by time-invariantly operating causes, then it is certainly appropriate to ask: But what then about explaining the explainers? What about causally predicting their actions? They are, after all, the persons who carry on the very process of creating hypotheses and of verification and falsification. In order to assimilate confirming or falsifying experiences—to replace old hypotheses with new ones—one must assumedly be able to learn from experience. Every empiricist is, of course, forced to admit this. Otherwise why engage in empirical research at all?

"But if one can learn from experience in as yet unknown ways, then one admittedly cannot know at any given time what one will know at a later time and, accordingly, how one will act on the basis of this knowledge. One can only reconstruct the causes of one's actions after the event, as one can explain one's knowledge only after one already possesses it. Indeed, no scientific advance could ever alter the fact that one must regard one's knowledge and actions as unpredictable on the basis of constantly operating causes. One might hold this conception of freedom to be an illusion. And one might well be correct from the point of view of a scientist with cognitive powers substantially superior to any human intelligence, or from the point of view of God. But we are not God, and even if our freedom is illusory from His standpoint and our actions follow a predictable path, for us this is

a necessary and unavoidable illusion. We cannot predict in advance, on the basis of our previous states, the future states of our knowledge or the actions manifesting that knowledge. We can only reconstruct them after the event.

“Thus, the empiricist methodology is simply contradictory when applied to the field of knowledge and action—which contains knowledge as its necessary ingredient. The empiricist-minded social scientists who formulate prediction equations regarding social phenomena are simply doing nonsense. Their activity of engaging in an enterprise whose outcome they must admit they do not yet know, proves that what they pretend to do cannot be done. As Mises puts it and has emphasized repeatedly: There are no empirical causal constants in the field of human action.”

The point is, perhaps determinism is correct; from God’s point of view. After all, He knows everything. But we are not yet in the Garden of Eden, where all will be revealed to us. Rather, we are still in the vale of tears, reality, that is. From our present perspective, the *only* one that rational man can adopt, free will is operational, and determinism a mirage.

Perhaps the strongest argument against determinism is that its advocates commit a performative contradiction (Hoppe, 2006). If this philosophy were true, it would be impossible to articulate it without contradiction, since to do so presupposes a thinking mind. On the basis of this one objection, we must concede, determinism might be *true*. That is entirely a different issue. Here, we are confining ourselves to objecting to anyone *claiming* it to be true, since in order for that to be the case, he must not be *compelled* to say it. The alternative option¹¹ must at least be *open* to him. But, according to determinism, this alternative is not a possibility, since he is *required* to say what he is in fact saying.

Thomas (2014) puts the matter in this way: “Free will is not only an observable fact, it is also inescapable. Whenever we use our minds, we are presupposing that we have the capacity to control our minds—to think about one thing rather than another, to go by the evidence and not be swayed by bias, to seek information when we need it, to examine our beliefs and weigh them against the facts. So it is self-refuting to argue against free will. After all, if free will is false, how can anyone choose to change his mind on an issue? Anyone convinced of determinism presupposes he has accepted his conclusion because it was true, not because he happened to be caused to accept it. Anyone trying to convince you of determinism presupposes you can focus your mind on his cogent logic and the facts in his favor.”

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¹¹ that determinism is false and free will true

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