Chapter Six
Compatibilism:
Objections and Replies

Overview

• Refuting Arguments Against Compatibilism
  – Consequence Argument – van Inwagen
  – Manipulation Argument – Pereboom

• Refining Compatibilism
  – No Chance Idea
  – Fischer and Ravizza’s Compatibilism
Consequence Argument

• (1) Determinism ⊃ Our actions necessarily follow from some past event (E_p) in conjunction with the Laws of Nature (LN).
• (2) The past (E_p) is not up to us.
• (3) The Laws of Nature are not up to us.
• ∴ (4) The consequences of E_p and LN are not up to us; i.e. our present actions are not up to us.
• Mele’s Objection: Given a particular reading of “up to us” this argument is invalid.
  — We are in proximate control of our actions, and they are in this sense “up to us”.
  — (1)-(3) all turn out true on Mele’s “up to us” reading, (4) does not.
Manipulation Argument

• Pereboom presents four cases:
  – Each sequential case ratchets down the level of manipulation, while satisfying compatibilist criteria for moral responsibility…
  – …yet intuitively in 1-3 the relevant agent (Plum) is not responsible.
    • Pereboom contends that CD: “causal determination by factors beyond Plum’s control most plausibly explains his lack of moral responsibility…”(139)
  – CD holds in Case 4, thus we are compelled to think that the agent in Case 4 is not responsible either.
    • Case 4 is simply a routine case on un-manipulated action.
  – Incompatibilism wins!!!
Manipulation Argument: Case 1

Case 1: Professor Plum was created by neuroscientists, who can manipulate him directly through the use of radio-like technology, but he is as much like an ordinary human being as is possible given this history. These neuroscientists manipulate him to undertake the process of reasoning by which his desires are brought about and modified. They do this by pushing a series of buttons just before he begins to reason about his situation, thereby causing his reasoning process to be rationally egoistic. Plum does not think and act contrary to character since his reasoning process is often manipulated to be rationally egoistic. His effective first-order desire to kill White conforms to his second-order desires. The process of deliberation from which his action results is reasons-responsive; in particular, this type of process would have resulted in his refraining from killing White in some situations in which the egoistic reasons were otherwise. Still, he is not exclusively rationally egoistic, since he typically regulates his behavior by moral reasons when the egoistic reasons are relatively weak – weaker than they are in the current situation. He is also not constrained in the sense that he does not act because of an irresistible desire – the neuroscientists do not provide him with a desire of this kind. (Pereboom 2007, pp. 94-5)
Manipulation Argument: Case 2

- Case 2: Plum is like an ordinary human being, except that a team of neuroscientists has programmed him at the beginning of his life to weigh reasons for action so that he is often but not exclusively rationally egoistic, with the consequence that in the circumstances in which he now finds himself, he is causally determined to undertake the reasons-responsive process of deliberation and to possess the set of first- and second-order desires that result in his killing White. Plum does have the general ability to regulate his behavior by moral reasons, but in his circumstances the egoistic reasons weigh heavily for him, and as a result he is causally determined to murder White. Nevertheless, he does not act because of an irresistible desire. (Pereboom 2007, pp. 95-6)
Manipulation Argument: Case 3

- Case 3: Plum is an ordinary human being, except that he was determined by the rigorous training practices of his home and community so that he is often but not exclusively rationally egoistic (exactly as egoistic as in Cases 1 and 2). His training occurred when he was too young to have had the ability to prevent or alter the practices that determined his character. As a result, Plum is causally determined to undertake the reasons-responsive process of deliberation and to possess the first- and second-order desires that result in his killing White. He does have the general ability to grasp, apply, and regulate his behavior by moral reasons, but in these circumstances the egoistic reasons are very powerful, and so the training practices of his upbringing, together with the background circumstances, deterministically result in his act of murder. Still, he does not act because of an irresistible desire. (Pereboom 2007, pp. 96)
Case 4: Physicalist determinism is true, everything in the world is completely physical, and Plum is an ordinary human being, raised in normal circumstances, who is often but not exclusively rationally egoistic (just as egoistic as in Cases 1–3). Plum’s act of killing White results from his undertaking the reasons-responsive process of deliberation, and he has the specified first- and second-order desires. He also possesses the general ability to grasp, apply, and regulate his behavior by moral reasons, but in these circumstances the egoistic reasons weigh very heavily for him, and as a result he is causally determined to murder White. But it is not due to an irresistible desire that he kills her. (Pereboom 2007, pp. 97)
Mele’s Critique of The Manipulation Argument

• Pereboom holds that CD: “causal determination by factors beyond Plum’s control most plausibly explains his lack of moral responsibility…”(139)

• Consider case 1a, 2a and 3a:
  – Just like Case 1, 2, and 3 but the processes involved are slightly indeterministic.
  – There is an “extremely good chance” that Plum will act as he does in the original cases, and “tiny chance“ of Plum getting incapacitated…
  – …but Plum is never incapacitated.

• Mele contends that our intuitions of non-responsibility do not change, despite the lack of causal determination.

• Plum’s lack of control, not CD, account for his non-responsibility in Cases 1-3, and Cases 1a-3a.
More “Manipulation” Cases

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Plum lacks control in Cases 1-3 (a-c), but not in Case 4.
Scarlet’s Car

• Incompatibilist Response to Mele’s Critique:
  – A-C considerations do not undermine the punch of the CD analysis of Cases 1-3 (and 4).

• Mele: Consider Scarlet’s Car
  – Case 1: Hit by a large wet pipe
  – Case 2: Hit by a large wet wrench.
  – Case 3: Hit by a large wet candlestick.
No-Chance Idea

• “NCI: Suppose that determinism is true of our universe. Then (1) shortly after the big bang, there was no chance that anything that has happened... would not happen, right down to the smallest detail. Consider everyone’s past actions, for example. Shortly after the big bang, there was no chance that they would not perform those actions. Moreover, (2) there was no chance of this because of the following fact about all past actions: shortly after the big bang, there was no chance that any of [the] causes [of their actions] would not occur... and no chance that any of [the] causes [of their action] would not have the effects they had. [{3}] Given 2, no agents are morally responsible...” (145, my emphasis)

• As a “way of [making] progress” a compatibilist should explain why (3) is not entailed by (2).
Fischer and Ravizza on Moral Responsibility

- F&R offer the following necessary and sufficient conditions for moral responsibility:
  - NC: An agent must “accept that he is a fair target of the reactive attitudes as a result of how he exercises [a certain kind of] agency in certain contexts” (146)
  - SC: “An agent is morally responsible for an actions insofar as it issues from his own, moderately reasons-responsive mechanism.” (149)
NC is Too Strong

• Reflective and Non-Reflective version of NC:
  – Non-Reflective: They consider themselves as apt candidate at the level of our social practices.
  – Reflective: such an “individual must view himself as, prime facie at least, an apt candidate for he application of the reactive attitudes, and be willing to put aside all residual doubts, for all practical purposes.” (147)
    • Too strong! Consider Phil pp. 147.
  – F-R respond, saying Phil is like an addict.
    • Mele: Nope, he’s reasons-responsive, and an addict is not.
SC is Too Weak

- SC: “An agent is morally responsible for an action insofar as it issues from his own, moderately reasons-responsive mechanism.” (149)

Regular reasons-receptivity

+ weak reasons reactivity. (WRR)

“The capacity to translate reasons to choice” (149)

An agent is WRR if for any actual action A, there is some nomologically possible world where there is sufficient reason to not-A, she recognizes those reasons, and not-As for those reasons.
SC is Too Weak (cont’d)

• Consider Agoraphobic Fred pp. 150.
  – Fred is weakly reasons-reactive, but not morally responsible for missing the wedding.
• F-R respond by distinguishing between blameworthiness and moral responsibility.
• Mele: This is odd, given that Phil is not morally responsible, while Fred is morally responsible.
  – Even odder, Phil is not blameworthy according to F-R, then Fred must be too.
How is Phil Not Blameworthy?

• Maybe because Phil believes he is no weakly reasons-reactive?
  — Mele: But, if Phil engages in “significant metaphysical reflection “ about determinism and responsibility, he would realize that *per* the discussion so far, determinism does not entail the denial of weak reasons-reactivity. (153)

• Maybe Phil does not see his reasons-responsive mechanism as “his own”?
  — Mele: Why does this matter?
F-R-like Response to NCI (2)

• Recall, Mele claims that a good compatibilist account should be able to block the move from NIC(2) to NCI (3).

• So long as an agent is weakly reasons-reactive, they cannot be characterized as being compelled, even though there is no chance that what caused their action would not cause it.