

Philosophical Profiles

Robert Kane

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IN BRIEF

Robert Kane is a University Distinguished Teaching Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of Texas at Austin. Along with too many articles to mention, Bob is the author of a number of books, among them *The Significance of Free Will* (Oxford, 1998), *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (Oxford, 2005) and *Ethics and the Quest for Wisdom* (Cambridge, 2010), and the editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (2002) and *Free Will* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003). As might be obvious, he has a particular interest in the philosophical debate over free will, to which he has contributed his own distinctive conception, which takes elements from both compatibilism and libertarianism. Regarding the latter, he made it his mission to avoid “panicky metaphysics” while staying true to the rash claim he made as a graduate student that he could make sense of libertarian intuitions in a scientific context. He attributes his committed pluralism to his childhood in Maynard, MA. Not one to shy away from challenges, having solved the puzzle of free will, he has turned more recently to reviving the ancient view of wisdom as uniting metaphysics and ethics. And all this because he read A.J. Ayer as a twelve-year-old but refused to be put off Philosophy as a career. However, it has to be said that he did not have a hand in the creation of Batman.

DETAILS

Simon Cushing conducted the following interview with Robert Kane on 24 August 2017.

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Robert Kane

a philosophical profile

SC: So, Bob Kane, what drew you to philosophy in the first place?

RK: That's rather hard to say. I was very interested even in my school days. And I read some philosophy at age twelve. I read a little book, you know they had those books that were sort of introductions to things for students, that they could look at and get a feel. And I read this thing at age twelve, and I regarded it as very fascinating, but very strange. And I didn't even agree with it, and I only found out later who the fellow was that wrote it. It was A.J. Ayers. And I was not turned on by any means, by the negativity about philosophy and what you could do with it, and what you could learn from it. And I think in a way a funny thing A.J. Ayer inspired me to really think that philosophy might have something, contrary to what he was having to say. But I didn't even know it was him, or who he was, or what he was talking about—I was just twelve. That sparked my interest I think, but I never really designed myself necessarily going into philosophy. When I went to college or anything like that. I was very interested in it, but I was interested in the intellectual life, I could have majored in any number of things, which I did. As a matter of fact I majored in German and French literature. But, I was at a school that required a lot of philosophy anyway.

Good school!

Well, yeah, it was a small Catholic school in Massachusetts. A very good school as a matter of fact, high quality. And they required a lot of philosophy anyway, and it was also a little bit dull, you know, some of that old Scholastic stuff. But at least it was good in ancient philosophy, I got the ancient Greeks and I got the medievals and early moderns. It wasn't too up on modern stuff, except for continental which I was interested in because of the English and French literature. Then in my junior year I went overseas and studied at the University of Vienna for one year. That was a pretty influential thing on me, because I got more into continental philosophy actually, but later I was to become an analyst, but that's a longer story. So, I got into continental philosophy over there. In fact, one of my teachers had a lecture that was fairly large, so I can't say I knew him or anything, but one of my lecturers was Viktor Frankl, who you may know as having written *Man's Search for Meaning*. He had been in concentration camps, and he was just out. That was 1959. And, he was well known as what they call—it was existential psychiatry in those days, kind of a combination of the psychiatric profession with the existentialists. And, he was very known to all those people over there. That was an influence. I had one guy that was really ferociously for Heidegger, but I had another Jewish professor who even then, long before it became known over here, was very down on Heidegger, and explained to us about his connections with Nazis. I was very into that long before it became a thing over here in America or among the various thinkers. That was a pretty decisive thing, and then I went back to school and thought, yeah, I like this stuff, this philosophy. So, I had to pick a graduate school and the number

one school at that time, which was 1960, happened to be Yale. It didn't last long because there was a big break up in the sixties later on that knocked it out of the running—some people retired and so on. But it was a top rated school then, and it was also big for me because it was one of the few that were known in those days as a pluralist department. That has always been a problem ever since in terms of our academic culture.

Right.

And, it was pluralist in those days, and being pluralist, they had any number of very good analytic philosophers there. And it turned out that I went there for the pluralism, which was good for me, but I was attracted to whom I thought was the best philosopher there, and that was Wilfred Sellars. And, I worked with him a lot. I took a full year course on Wittgenstein. And, any number of other courses with him. But I also studied with others. Norwood Russell Hanson was a very well-known philosopher of science. I really liked him a lot. A few years later, of course, he had a tragic death in that plane accident, when he was flying up there. But he influenced me. And then a whole range of logicians: Nuel Belnap, Alan Anderson, and Fred Fitch. Fitch and many of these guys went on with Sellars to Pittsburgh, very shortly—'65 or '66 and so on and so forth, because of the stress, all pluralist departments have a lot of internal stress, it's very hard to hold them together. And that was happening here, and they finally all packed up and left together, including one of my friends who was a graduate student at the time, Rich Thomason. He went with them. And I liked these guys, and I hung out with them a lot in Alan Anderson's suite, because he was a master at one of the colleges and they were at that time developing what they call relevance logic, I think you probably know about that. But it was in development stage then and I sat in in a lot of their meetings and I was fascinated by them, and I still get along—I was taken by the fact that later on in life when Belnap and several other people at Pittsburgh put out a very interesting book on time and indeterminism, they used Thomason's branching-time theory of the world and added to it action theory. Now I wish I could remember the name of that book [*Facing the Future: Agents and Choices in Our Indeterminist World*, Belnap, Perloff and Xu, Oxford University Press, 2001], but it came out about ten years ago. And it's a very, very good account that I can use in my own work, you know, about how we can relate indeterminism and branching-time to the notion of action, and how we choose and how we act and so on and so forth. But all very, very formal stuff. And, Belnap sent—since they quoted me several times in the book about how this might be related to free will, Belnap sent me a copy of the book signed by the three guys—there was another couple of other guys, more computer science oriented types that wrote it with them—sent me a copy of the book, and said "you might enjoy this and you will like the fact that we spoke kindly of your view and your notion of the intelligibility problem about free will, and thought we might have some contribution to it." But, he had completely forgotten, so I had to write back to him and say, "thank it's great, I said, but I was a student of yours, back at Yale," and he had completely forgotten.

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It's pretty amazing he's still doing top-level work.

I know, that's true. But anyway, so I worked on my dissertation, and—by the way, it was a diverse department. One of the people I was attracted to most was Brand Blanchard, you know, he was an old-time British idealist, these guys were [Bernard] Bosanquet and [F.H.] Bradley and all those guys—there's a Library of Living Philosophers book on Brand—and I really liked him too, so I liked the pluralism. But I really was attracted to Sellars and worked with him. And, my dissertation was on intentionality and mind. And I didn't really segue into freewill until a few years later although I got interested in it with him. He was a compatibilist.

Yeah, maybe this would be a good segue. That time, 50s and 60s, was a time where most people were compatibilists, I would say, and there was exciting work. In the debate between the compatibilists and the libertarians it seemed to be that compatibilists were winning and you've got these major papers, particularly [Peter] Strawson's "Freedom and Resentment" but also [Harry] Frankfurt's work. so maybe, for viewers of this who aren't familiar with the main problems, and because you're famous for presenting all of the problems in books like A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will (Oxford University Press, 2005), you could sort of lay out what compatibilism is and then the major problems for it.

That's good. Indeed, this was by the way a period between '60 and '64, when I was there with Sellars. And, as I've often said in my writings, the landscape of the free will issue was very different in those days, because for one thing you were coming off a strong Logical Positivist tradition which regarded the problem as a pseudo-problem, because it was all about freedom of action and there were no particular difficult philosophical issues about freedom of action. And, the whole question of determinism was a non-starter: "don't worry about it, it's not a problem for free will." And compatibilists therefore were people who thought, in the words of Dan Dennett, that we could have all the "freedom worth wanting" even if determinism were true.

So in other words, determinism being the view that if you could have a snapshot of the complete state of the universe at any moment, and you knew all of the laws of the universe, you could map out the entire future of the universe thenceforth, including every action that any being would take in that time.

Yes. That's right, but I usually don't put it that way, I put it in a simpler way that I think is more historically accurate going all the way back to the Stoics and many others. And that is, that determinism is the view that, given the past at any time, and the laws governing the universe, there is only one possible future. That would mean that the alternative, indeterminism, is the view that at least at some times, given the past at some times in the history of the universe, and the laws governing it, there's more than one possible future. The garden of forking paths kind of picture.

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Nowadays compatibilists want to say there are still other possible worlds, it's just that they have slightly different laws from ours.

Yeah, well, they might say that, and they also say that if free will is compatible with determinism, if it should turn out that there's indeterminism in the universe—I mean, if the indeterministic interpretation of quantum theory should be right—compatibilism in their view is still the right view, because it wouldn't matter. In fact indeterminism would cause a problem because it would make it uncertain what you were doing. It would mean you would lose control. I mean in some ways you could say that Hume was not a determinist, because he didn't think you could bring necessity and possibility into the description of the laws. If the laws weren't necessary, then maybe there might be a different future, but Hume was a compatibilist, because he thought that wouldn't be of any help to free will whatsoever, because if we're going to decide something it has to be that that decision comes out of our best reasons and whatever, and the way we are at the time, and if it doesn't, it's not really free and responsible action, it will be an accident or something. So a lot of modern compatibilists now, taking quantum theory seriously, say, "well we're not denying that determinism might be false, but it doesn't really matter for the free will issue, because we have free will with determinism anyway, and indeterminism wouldn't be any help," as some people like to put it, with free will anyway. So, they are still compatibilists, and basically the idea is that we can have all the "freedom worth wanting" even if determinism were true.

I think if you're British you have to be a compatibilist, or at least for the most part. So, that always made perfect sense to me: Locke and Mill and Hume and all those guys are basically compatibilists, and the position being that what I want out of freedom is I want control. I want it to be the case that I consider my action free if it's what I wanted or what I desired, combined with my beliefs. So, if I'm in control of my action, that's what's important about freedom, and not being free is when somebody else is forcing me to do something either by holding a gun to me or by brainwashing me or whatever. But it must be the case that to be free I have to be in control, which requires determinism, because if things happen at random, then I could want to move my arm and then suddenly my arm flies off in another direction and that's not freedom, that's absence of freedom. So, I found compelling the randomness complaint against libertarianism, but you have a response to that, or at least you have a way of dealing with that.

It's an extremely powerful complaint and it comes under many forms, you know, luck, chance, accident, all that kind of stuff, and I do have a response to it, but before I get to it, let's stick with the 1960 situation, where I say that in those days, and it's still the case today, compatibilism was the default position for any philosopher who took science seriously, who didn't want to appeal to mystery. And libertarians, at that time, all of them had some kind of mysterious or obscure account of things. I mean, going way back to Kant with a noumenal world, because somehow we can't make sense of an indeterministic universe—Cartesians with immaterial soul, or down to modern times in the '50s and '60s, it was some sort of agent-causation theory where there was a special kind of agent-cause that couldn't in principle be caused itself by prior events.

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[Roderick] Chisholm had a view like that didn't he?

RK: Absolutely, Rod Chisholm was a big guy there, and Sellars' arguments with Chisholm about the nature of mind and how it worked was part of my dissertation. I had a great admiration for Chisholm as a philosopher too, but he held this view, this agent-causation view, as did others, and then there even views that so called non-causalist views, views that volitions just can't be caused, and things like that. And, in his famous essay, which we've mentioned, in 1962, "Freedom and Resentment," Strawson spoke here very nicely and influentially about the fact of what he called—all of these views—"panicky metaphysics of libertarianism" and that was the usual assumption. If you were a scientifically-oriented person you had to be a compatibilist. And otherwise you had to engage in some kind of crazy panicking metaphysics, you have to postulate extra entities, and so on. And I liked neither of those options, and as a matter of fact, that was my initial getting-into-this with Sellars, even though I didn't do it in my dissertation.

Wise move, don't get into it with you advisor while you're writing your dissertation.

For one thing, he admired Strawson's essay, "Freedom and Resentment." He admired Strawson generally, because Sellars had made the distinction between the manifest image of humans in the world and the scientific image, which has been an influential distinction ever since, and the manifest image is what we now think of as the folk-psychology, folk-intuitions, the way we normally think about it, and the scientific image is what we understand science to be, whatever that is. And his view was that we have mixed intuitions in the manifest image. Many of them are compatibilist, but there are some that are libertarianism, incompatibilist. But when you move over to the scientific image, you can't make any sense of the libertarian intuitions, even though they might be over here. So you've got to drop them, and being a scientific realist, that was the issue for him. And it's interesting that he took Strawson's book, *Individuals*, as a prime example of the manifest image, in general. And so "Freedom and Resentment" was just part of that whole picture. Well, I went into his office one day and I was very interested in the problem and was thinking of writing a paper on it for the course. And I said to him, well I'm not sure I said, "I think we can make sense of free will in the scientific image." And that has been my project for forty-odd years because that's really what I'm doing. I completely eschew and I reject and I don't think adequate any of the panicky metaphysics of traditional libertarianism. So I just throw those things out the window. "What can we do without them?" that was my question. So I went into Sellars' office one day and talked with him about a paper I was doing, and I said that I was going to try to show that you could actually make sense of a libertarian free will within a scientific context, without appealing to mystery and so on. And he was very doubtful, and I said to him, "Okay I'll be back in three weeks with an answer," and he laughed and went back to—

Forty years later, you're nearly there.

He went back to reading his *Sports Illustrated*. And then like the brash and naïve graduate student, at the door, I turned around and said, "Or at least by the end of the semester." So, anyway, that was how it all started, and as I often joke, as you just put it

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nicely, forty, forty-five years later, I'm still at it. So it wasn't so easy. But it was certainly invigorating. So anyways, go ahead with your next question.

Why can't you be happy with compatibilism which, as you said, Dennett says, gives us all the "freedom worth wanting"? Apparently you want more: what is the more you want?

Absolutely. And I can put it a number of ways. You can come at it either from the point of view of freedom or from the point of view of responsibility. Let me start with the responsibility side, just for the moment, because I think it's a good side. I believe there are two dimensions of responsibility: the first dimension is the obvious one that compatibilists and everybody can capture and understand, and that is, responsibility for expressing in action the will you have, where we understand "the will" in a broad sense to mean your character traits, your motives, your emotions, your feelings, any of those complex sets of dispositions that incline you to act in one way or another. That's one of the meanings of will, historically. So, the first dimension of responsibility is, responsibility for expressing in action the will you have without constraint, without anybody preventing you, without coercion, whatever. So, it really comes from your own self. That is the kind of responsibility that compatibilists get, and what they want. And it's very important, and I don't deny it for a minute. But, I believe there's a second dimension of responsibility that we are concerned with in life, in many practical contexts, but even beyond that, in the courtroom for example or whatever. And that is the second dimension of responsibility that I call responsibility for *having* the will that you express in action. So we have responsibility for expressing the *will you have* in action, and responsibility for *having* the will you will express in action.

Right, so the example that Dennett uses, and I don't know if he was the first to use this, but it's the one of Martin Luther who famously said, "Here I stand, I can do no other." Now, let's take him literally. Probably it's not true, but let's take him literally, that he cannot do otherwise than what he did, because of the nature of his character and his will. So, in that case his character and his will completely determine his action. Nonetheless, we regard him as free. So, Dennett says, "Voilà, that's good enough!" Whereas you want to say is, "No, what we require is he has to have had some kind of role in shaping the character that determines his action, because if it was just handed to him or if it was created by others, then he wouldn't be free." Is that right?

That's well put, and that's the way I answer Dennett in any number of writings on this score. I point out that I do not deny that he could have been completely responsible even if he was determined by his existing will at that time. But, that would be on my view to the degree that in the process of his past life he had brought himself to a state where he had that will that he had then. Indeed I think if we were to look at Luther's biography, we see the many struggles he went through, and the conflicts he had to undergo, where I believe he could've gone down different paths, but he didn't, and he brought himself to this point. I mean, if anybody struggled... Because I see that getting that deeper sense of creating your own will or forming your own will is what I mean by free will. And it occurs in occasions which I call *self-forming actions*, and these are actions which arise

“ I see that getting that deeper sense of creating your own will or forming your own will is what I mean by free will. And it occurs in occasions which I call self-forming actions, and these are actions which arise when there are various conflicts in our lives, where we have good reasons for going either way, and we have to decide between them. ”

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when there are various conflicts in our lives, where we have good reasons for going either way, and we have to decide between them. So, in those situations of conflict, I argue, that what happens is that the conflict and the difficulty in the choice stirs up a certain amount of indeterminism from the synaptic levels in the brain and actually that indeterminism is amplified by the non-linear processing in the brain which is very well accepted. It's not exactly chaos all the time, but that's the idea. And, we know that the brain gets worked up in situations of conflict, so we get that stirring up of conflict in the brain, and so the uncertainty we feel phenomenologically is reflected in an actual indeterminism in our neural processes.

I can quote you: "There is a tension and uncertainty in our minds at such times of inner conflict which are reflected in appropriate regions of our brains by movement away from thermodynamic equilibrium"—there's your scientific realism—" in short, a kind of stirring up of chaos in the brain that makes it sensitive to microindeterminacies at the neuronal level. As a result, the uncertainty and inner tension we feel at such soul-searching moments of self-formation is reflected in the indeterminacy of our neural processes themselves. What is experienced phenomenologically as uncertainty corresponds physically to the opening of a window of opportunity that temporarily screens off complete determination by the past." ["Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on free will and indeterminism," *Journal of Philosophy* 96, (5), pp. 224-5.] And that last part presumably is your response to the "consequence argument," as it is now called.

Yeah. That's right. That's the idea, but the only thing I'd change there now, is, I'd leave out the chaos, because it doesn't necessarily require chaos, which is a tricky, complicated business. Rather, all you need is non-linearity in the processing of the brain, because it will amplify minor things and so on, that point has been made by a number of recent philosophers of science. And it's very well known, there's some debate about the extent to which chaos plays a role in the brain, although it's often thought so, but—there's widespread acknowledgement that the brain is non-linear in its functioning. And that's good enough to amplify minute quantum indeterminacies, if the occasion arises. Even one of the more really hard-nosed neuroscientists around, Christof Koch, who denies all the kind of extravagant views about how indeterminism might be in the brain and be the source of consciousness—[Roger] Penrose and some of these other people, he's skeptical of all those views—but he says the one thing that you cannot rule out, is that minute quantum indeterminacies at the synaptic level or in the neurons, and so on, might at times be amplified in the neural processing of the brain, and that's where we might get the randomness that is well-known to occur there. On other views, you need some wilder things, like quantum collapses that involve the whole brain—on my view, that's all you need.

So when you say self-forming actions, there seems to be two senses of this. In the first sense, the self or the will, the thing that determines Martin Luther to nail the theses to the door, the self must be formed for it to be free. So, that's the one sense that—the self is the thing being formed. But then at the same time, you also want to

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say, it must be me that's doing it, so the self is both formee and former, which sounds like bootstrapping, which sounds impossible.

Well, no it isn't, because you see the self could have been formed by the past, by the upbringing, by the genes, the environment, in the normal way that people think about that. But it's formed in such a way, I would say, that, at certain points in life, the will and the structure of the brain, and the structure of the self is such that we enter into complex situations in which more than one option is consistent with the way our self has been so far formed. And even if our self so far formed is completely determined, we can encounter situations in which that determined self is actually now torn between different things, and we come to a crossroads, because each of these things are consistent with our existing will, with everything we are. My example I often use and it's often quoted and discussed: a businesswoman is going to a meeting, and she's very ambitious, and she's got to get to this meeting and she's afraid her boss will be angry with her if she doesn't make it on time. She sees an assault in an alley, and she also thinks of herself as a moral person. Nobody else is around, but if she stops and gets the police or gets some help, then this bad act won't take place, but then she'll be late to the meeting, and she imagines the boss, and she might even lose her job—this is such a crucial meeting. So she is torn in that way. Now, those are the kinds of situations I think, in which she could go either way, and her will is torn either way, and she makes a choice, and that choice is a forming choice for her, because as Aristotle says, you make enough of these over time, you make enough immoral acts over time and you become an immoral person. And Aristotle says, in answer to objections about that, that only a fool would fail to realize that if you go on doing selfish things, you're going to become a selfish person, whole-hog, and the other way around. And this is what happens. Now, it does follow that my notion of developing or forming a will is a matter of degree. I believe a number of things about free will: as I understand it, it's very limited. Because we are very much influenced by heredity and environment and so on. And that's where the science part comes in, but the traditional notion of appealing to extra-panicky metaphysics was to get us outside the scientific nexus, and to act quite independently of those influences on us, and I think one aspect of trying to make sense of this within science, is to realize that free will is a very limited thing. It's not an all or nothing affair. At any given time, we're always hemmed in by these possibilities. Now, there's a big debate that people bug me about—there are many, there are so many, I can hardly even list them—but one is, what about the first SFAs of childhood? What happens there? And I have a view about that, it's a very good point. When do they start and how do they start? Because clearly when they start, you do have that idea that you put forward that we're totally determined at that point. Well, how do they start? Well, I suspect they start somewhere between 2 and 3, when the child begins to question whether they should do what mommy says or take the cookies, or this or that. You see that happening around there. I think that's where the first SFAs begin. I once gave a talk on this at some university or other, and when I said this—it happens a lot—the chairmen of the department says, "Oh no wait a minute, I've got a little kid who's less than two years old, and he's doing it, he used to sit up on his high chair and swoosh all that food right off no problem. But now, he looks at me before he does it, and I know he's thinking, Should I upset Daddy or should I do what I want to do?" And I said, "well okay, you've got a very bright boy there." So, he insists—it's

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funny, I often get that from parents, who've said, "Well, *my* child does that earlier than that."

Little do they know they should allow their child the bliss of irresponsibility for a little bit longer. They're advocating for child prisons.

Well, there are two sides to that but—here's the other point about this. It's very interesting to speculate about this, because my view is that, in those first SFAs, the responsibility is very minimal, almost infinitesimal. And, therefore it's crazy, like this woman who took her child down to the police department and threatened jail to him to straighten him out.

Oh, that happened to Hitchcock. Apparently that's why he was terrified of the police, because his dad did that to him when he was a kid.

There you go—that's truly absurd. But it's not off the map to have minor punishments, like, you know, "go to your room," or "no dessert tonight," or you know, little things, because, on my view, it's equally a mistake for parents not to hold the children responsible at all at a very early age, because if you do that, they will not develop a will of their own formation, and, any kind of discipline about these matters. So there are two mistakes here, one is to think we're not responsible at all for these things and not to be held so by parents; and the other is that we're somehow totally responsible which is absurd. So, I believe that responsibility is very limited at that age, and it is limited all along throughout our life, but it develops over time as we make more and more SFAs. For a child, if they're still doing these things at age 8, 9, 10, 12, then you might have a problem.

Yeah, here's something that has occurred to me in thinking about this. It seems one of the things that is a matter of brute luck, let's say, or genetics or whatever, is how shapeable your self is. So, for example, it might be the case that some peoples' selves are very hard to shape. So for example, if they choose probity in one instance, this won't necessarily take. In other words, it's as if they're made of very hard rock, and somebody's trying to shape their character and it just sort of bounces off. On your view, it looks like they will then be exposed to more self-forming actions, so it'll be a series of self-forming actions, because it won't be the case that they'll be diverted into one kind of character trait, they'll still have both options just as much.

Oh, okay, now, yes, there are going to be people like this, and the extreme on this spectrum you of course have psychopaths. And just as I say, it's a matter of degree, that degree can go to zero in some cases, you know, Gary Watson has this wonderful article "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil" on this serial killer, Robert Harris, on death row in California, whose father rejected him because he thought the mother was pregnant from another guy, and the mother didn't want to lose the father, so she rejected him from an early age. He tried to come up to her and she'd push him away. And we have to have enough human sense to realize that his ability to develop a character of his own, other than the vicious person he became, is very limited, probably minimal. And this is

“ This is what should happen in the so-called punishment phase of criminal trials: we focus on the first dimension of responsibility, did he do it, did it come from his will, is he coerced, or whatever, but then in the punishment phase, we begin to look into the history of the person, and we may mitigate the punishment. ”

what should happen in the so-called punishment phase of criminal trials: we focus on the first dimension of responsibility, did he do it, did it come from his will, is he coerced, or whatever. In the guilt phase, although I wouldn't like to use that word alone, because I think guilt applies to both, but then in the punishment phase, we begin to look into the history of the person, and we may mitigate the punishment. This is interesting, because if I'm right about its being a matter of degree, then talking about mitigating punishment, and even in some cases reducing it to zero, is relevant, and apt, and appropriate. And, so I stress that very much. As a matter of fact, I have a little saying, that in an ideal world we wouldn't make judgments about moral responsibility at all, we would leave them all to God. Or some omniscient being. And that is my own expression of the limitations we would feel here. So my view is that—I tell a story like Watson's and in his recent book, Shaun Nichols—he discusses my example and Watson's about a trial—and my own example comes from personal stuff in our neighborhood. A young man had assaulted and raped a young girl, and we knew the young girl's family, and we went to the trial and so on. And, clearly he was guilty and he was a vicious young man, and you listen to the whole story and it's clear that he did it of his own will, it was a vicious will, but he did it of his own will. And all the evidence pointed in that direction. But then when they started going through the punishment phase and looking at this thing, most of us there began to feel that the punishment would at least be mitigated because of the horrible circumstances that were described, something like Watson's description of Robert Harris. And that happened to most of us, and some people say, Well that happened to you because you're a philosopher—no way, our neighbors were there, my wife and myself, and over here we have a football coach, and across the street a businesswoman, and a computer guy, the guy next door is an inventor of Yeti Coolers, and you know, they're ordinary folk. They were all like us, saying "I don't know, this kid had a really rough time, and we should mitigate." And then my thought is, if there are any people in that courtroom who are not moved at all by this story of the kid's upbringing, and his past, but said, "No no, he did it, he's a vicious bastard, put him away," then what I say is I wouldn't want those people anywhere near a jury, deciding the fate of anybody I loved or cared about, or anybody whatever, that's the line I use at that point. That's where I feel strongly about this other dimension of freedom, how we've got responsibility for having the particular will that we do have. And in answer to Dennett on this Luther example, which I have discussed on a number of occasions, I agree with Dennett, that yes, Luther could have been fully and totally responsible for this act, even if he was totally determined at the moment of doing it. It might be the most responsible act of his whole life, but I would still say that he would be so to the degree that through many self-forming actions in his past he had made himself into the kind of person he was then, so that's the line.

I'm going to quote you again: "if there were no such undetermined SFAs in our lifetimes, there would have been nothing we could have ever voluntarily done to make ourselves different than we are—a condition that I think is inconsistent with our having the kind of responsibility for being what we are which genuine free will requires." ["Responsibility, Luck, and Chance: Reflections on free will and

“When I give you these two dimensions of responsibility, the first one is the one that compatibilists capture, and it's related to freedom of action. This is the freedom to express your will in action. It's the second dimension that I see is related to freedom of will, so I distinguish freedom of action and freedom of will, so there are many freedoms, and indeed there is a whole spectrum of freedoms of action. **”**

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indeterminism," *Journal of Philosophy* 96, (5), p. 224.] So, I'm going to push you a little bit on this...

Could I interpose one further distinction here? When I give you these two dimensions of responsibility, the first one is the one that compatibilists capture, and it's related to freedom of action. This is the freedom to express your will in action. It's the second dimension that I see is related to freedom of will, so I distinguish freedom of action and freedom of will, so there are many freedoms, and indeed there is a whole spectrum of freedoms of action.

Five freedoms, you say, in the last chapter of *Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*.

In the last chapter I have five, and I read that the other day, anticipating this. And, I said, "Gee, this is pretty damn good!" But they are worth discussing by the way because they all have a role in the history of the debates of the problem. But, in any case, I distinguish freedom of action and freedom of will, and freedom of will is connected with the second dimension of responsibility, and freedom of action is with the first. And the way I see the development of modern thought with Locke, and Hobbes, and Hume, and other people like this, is to say, Oh now, the will, that was some notion of the medievals, outdated now, not fit for modern science. We've got to focus on freedom of action and the freedom of the agent, that's what Locke said. And in a way he's right if he means the problem isn't about the freedom of the will, the problem is about the freedom of agency, said Locke. And he's absolutely right, except my answer is, the freedom of agency has two dimensions: namely the freedom of action and the freedom of will, and it's that second dimension of free agency that has caused all the problems down through history. No one would have a problem about freedom of action. Compatibilists covered that one. Now, when it comes to freedom of will, compatibilists say, "We can't have that anyway because of this ultimacy business and the regresses, and the luck, and the chance, and all the rest of it. Okay, I buy it, I realize there are very serious problems here, and you have to make sense of this freedom of will, maybe it doesn't make sense. But it is different from freedom of action.

I have a sort of two-pronged point. The first point is, why can't it be the case that a compatibilist could say "I absolutely agree with you, that you've got to have freedom of action and you've got to have this freedom of self-formation, but I can give a compatibilist account of self-formation"? For example, this seems to be Mill's view, Mill does seem to have the view that you can change the way you are by working at it.

Right. Well, yes, and that is a very common thing. But the question is at every juncture, when you are supposedly changing the way you are, the question is: could you have done otherwise than change your self in the way you did? And if determinism is true, the answer has to be no.

“ I think ambivalence is crucial for free will. The conflict, and ambivalence, means ambi-valence. There must be points in life where we really must be ambi-valent, and we could go either way, given our whole past. ”

Okay, so that brings in the requirement for indeterminism.

Granted, we are constantly changing ourselves, so we have that feeling of doing it. But, if indeed the change we make in ourselves at any given time is in fact determined by our past, then we don't have free will in a sense, as I understand it. But you're absolutely right, some compatibilists try to capture this notion. Some don't, by the way. Harry Frankfurt doesn't worry about it. This is often said to be a historical dimension to freedom, and some compatibilists say, no we've got to have that. John Fischer, for example, thinks we must have it. And Mike McKenna thinks we might have it, but there are some like Frankfurt that are very adamant that we don't need it. In fact I'll tell you a story about Frankfurt. In the 1980s I wrote him a letter, I'm still just a reasonably young philosopher of course, and had great admiration for him. He was influential, and I said "the usual objection to your view, is that your view is that we have free will when we are wholeheartedly committed to what we're doing, so that our whole self is behind what we do." That by the way is what I call freedom of self-perfection in the final chapter of the *Contemporary Introduction*. So, we're wholeheartedly committed to doing what we want to do and there's no ambivalence. That's when we truly have free will. And, the usual argument against him by Watson and any number of others is the standard kind of regress type of thing, saying, "Wait a minute, are we responsible for becoming wholehearted? Or, what?" And that's a good objection, I think, that's an important objection, but I had another one that no one had ever made. And it's been repeated a few times, but I sent it to him in this letter, I gave the regular objection, but then I said, "Another thing bothers me however: if free will is what you mean, then we never can get from ambivalence to wholeheartedness of our own free will, because we wouldn't have free will till we got there." You see, I think ambivalence is crucial for free will. The conflict, and ambivalence, means ambi-valence. There must be points in life where we really must be ambi-valent, and we could go either way, given our whole past. And ambivalence really means, which Frankfurt throws out the window, he hates, is the key in my mind to free will. Not necessarily free action, but free will. And, he took a few weeks to respond because this was letter-writing, before email. I often tell student audiences that this was a time you don't remember, it was just after the last ice age. But anyway, he responded in a very straightforward way, it was amazing, he said, "Many people think I'm crazy, but I don't think it matters one whit how we got to be the way we are—what matters is whether we're wholehearted. It could've come about by a combination of luck and past circumstances and our upbringing and so on. What really matters is not how we got there, but what we are because wholeheartedness is a great thing, and it's a great thing to attain." And that was his answer, it was pretty straightforward, and pretty honest, and whatever, but clearly it was a total rejection of the historical dimension. So, not all of them do this, and Frankfurt was pretty straightforward about this. But, some realize that there's a bit of an issue here. And so they want to make sense of it, and Fischer's one, McKenna's another, Watson struggled with it too I think. All of these people are compatibilists, I mean, so they had to deal with it somehow. So, you can go back to your question. So, they want to try to make sense of self-making because we obviously do—go ahead.

“ On my view, and this is not true of all incompatibilists, indeterminism is nowhere near enough to get us free will. You need two conditions: you need the fact that the choices are undetermined, could go either way, but that you have a kind of control over them such that either way they go, you have the power to voluntarily, intentionally, and rationally, go this way, or voluntarily, intentionally, and rationally go that way. ”

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It seems like with your self-forming actions, you're doing two things at once. I want to say that, compatibilists think they can give self-forming actions, and you say they're not good enough. And the reason you say they're not good enough is because there has to be this "could have done otherwise" element, which is where indeterminism comes in—because you point to quantum mechanics as a scientific basis for indeterminism. So, it seems like you're doing two things: you're providing for formation of the will, while at the same time responding to the consequence objection, this view that if determinism is true, then nothing is up to us.

Yes.

So you're sort of baking the indeterminism into the self-formation, and that's what your plural voluntary control notion does.

Yeah, I call it plural voluntary control, because on my view, and this is not true of all incompatibilists, indeterminism is nowhere near enough to get us free will. You need two conditions: you need the fact that the choices are undetermined, could go either way, but that you have a kind of control over them such that either way they go, you have the power to voluntarily, intentionally, and rationally, go this way, or voluntarily, intentionally, and rationally go that way.

What you're doing there is you're blocking off the randomness objection that the compatibilists offer. If things just happen to me, then I wouldn't be free. Whereas you're saying, either way I go, it will be something that I would fully endorse.

Right, that's the idea to block off the randomness objection. But, it doesn't block it off by just saying it, because it's a hell of a job explaining how you can have plural voluntary control over these outcomes, given that they are undetermined. That's where all the work begins. But this requirement is there, and one reason for making it is that you can imagine situations, I mean, John (J.L.) Austin imagined this years ago, as did Elizabeth Anscombe—indeterminism does in fact function in our choices, but it isn't anything like free will. For example, I use this example—if you go up to a coffee machine, intending to press the button for black coffee, and because of some indeterminism in your neural processes, either in the brain or in the arm, you press the wrong button, that's undetermined. But supposing that it was undetermined, you could've pressed the wrong button, and you press the right button, then you did it, and you were free, and it was voluntary, intentional, and rational, and you could've done otherwise—but that's not like anything like what we mean by free will. So I caution libertarians and incompatibilists about just talking about "could've done otherwise." That's not good enough. It's "could've done otherwise, voluntarily, rationally, and intentionally could've gone more than one way," that's what I mean by plural voluntary control. And you need that, because just being able to do otherwise—now when I said that coffee machine example, you know that J.L. Austen had the classic example, he talked about a three-foot putt, which he might miss, and he says, "you know it was undetermined, but I hit it. That still means I did it, even though it was undetermined. And I'm responsible for doing it"—now I play on that idea too by the way, but the point is that indeterminism just isn't enough to deal with the "could've done otherwise" issue. So, that's worth making

too, so you're right. I have this plural voluntary control, and indeterminism, you need those two things together, for SFAs. By the way you don't need them for other free will choices, like Luther's later on.

But it is your view that if it were the case that if Luther no SFAs in his history, then his "Here I stand I can do no other" actually wouldn't be free—

No, it would be an act of freedom, free action. If all the other compatibilist conditions were satisfied, if he wasn't coerced, not compulsively acting, doing it intentionally, he knew exactly what he was doing, you know, all those compatibilist conditions are absolutely important. In fact, they're important for my own SFAs. You have to satisfy those conditions as well in my SFAs, but they're not enough, because you got to have the plural voluntary control too. But those conditions are absolutely crucial, and they also are a very necessary element in responsibility. Dennett happens to assume all that with Luther in this case, as do most of us, because it did seem to be that none of these other conditions held. So, yeah, there have to be these conditions and these are the conditions for freedom of action and responsibility in the first dimension. And I don't underplay this. It's an interesting thing about incompatibilists views of free will, they presuppose compatibilist views as an essential part of them, the opposite of course does not hold. So, I don't underestimate all of the compatibilist thoughts here about what it amounts to, and it's necessary, but to me, it's not sufficient for what I call ultimate responsibility.

Perhaps you know this, but someone who's taken your view, or at least a view very like yours, and applied it in a kind of interesting way, in a philosophy of religion question is a guy called James Sennett, and he wrote this paper about whether or not we're free in heaven. Because, of course, this is a puzzle with regard to the problem of evil. The usual response to the problem of evil, is the free will theodicy, where they say, "Yes, God is all-powerful and all-loving, but the reason why there's evil is because he gave us this undetermined free will. So it has to be libertarian free will, because if it's consequentialist free will, then he could've set up the laws of the universe so that we were caused always to act in a good way. So, it has to be libertarian free will, and that's why we do evil on earth. But, then the obvious question is, what about in heaven? Are there going to be people in heaven murdering and doing evil things? And they want to say, "No, in heaven you will always do good." But then if heaven is supposed to be the best possible place, does that mean we're not free in the best possible place? That undercuts your whole free will defense because what's the value of giving us freedom? If we don't have it in heaven, it's obviously not such a great thing. So, the puzzle is you have to both say, we are free in heaven because otherwise freedom doesn't have the great value it needs to have for the free will defense, but also somehow we don't do evil, but you've also got to say, and yet we do evil on earth because of freedom. And his ingenious suggestion is, that the freedom we have on earth is the kind of freedom of self-formation, but when we get to heaven, we have fully formed selves, and we no longer need to form them anymore because they're perfect, so we will just be like Luther and we can do

“ The third compatibilist freedom is the interesting one. It's the freedom of self-perfection, and this is the freedom of the saints in heaven, if you wanted an image of it, who cannot do wrong because their will is formed in such a way that they are unable to do evil. And by the way, it would seem that that must be the freedom God has, too. ”

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no otherwise than the good that we do. So, you can see it's kind of an ingenious use of your account.

Well, it is, and it's exactly what I would try to say here if I said anything. Now, I try to be a little cautious on the religious dimensions, for obvious reasons, because it's like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire, but that's the direction I would go, and I would refer you here once again that you showed that last chapter I have of my Contemporary Introduction to Free Will. I distinguish five freedoms. The first three are compatibilist freedoms and the last two are libertarian freedoms. The first is self-realization and that is the ability to realize the self or will you have in action, that's the one we understand. That's the usual compatibilist one. The second one is the freedom of reflective self-control, which a number of compatibilists have put forward, including Frankfurt and others. And that's a legitimate kind of freedom too. But the third compatibilist freedom is the interesting one. It's the freedom of self-perfection, and this is the freedom of the saints in heaven, if you wanted an image of it, who cannot do wrong because their will is formed in such a way that they are unable to do evil. And by the way, it would seem that that must be the freedom God has, too, in a religious context. So, you need that freedom of self-perfection idea. It's interesting if you look at the history of the free-will debate, you find a tremendous amount of confusion about this, because many people who've talked about—even Augustine, at a certain point he comes to a point of saying, well, yeah, we could have perfect freedom and it turns out it would be the freedom of self-perfection. And a lot of these people discussing these religious things historically, do not distinguish between the freedom of self-perfection from the other two freedoms that I put in my list of five. And, they are the freedom of self-determination, which Luther has when he does act from a will that he had formed earlier, the freedom of self-determination. And, the last one I call the freedom of self-formation, which is what we do when we engage in self-forming actions. Now this is interesting, however—it just occurred to me as a matter of fact that the saints in heaven, like Sennett says—this sounds to me very astute—they would have the freedom of self-perfection, and that is a legitimate freedom. But, they would also have what I call the libertarian freedom of self-determination, because that's what Luther had when he was determined to do the right thing here, that he thought was the right thing, because he had formed himself in such a way that he would do that.

That would be something that God wouldn't have though.

Yeah, that's interesting, and that depends on the view you have about God. And that's another complicated business. If your view is of God being eternal, and unchanging, then you're absolutely right. And that would be a problem. When I think about religious issues, and I sometimes do a little philosophy of religion, I'm inclined to think that the idea of God as an eternal and totally unchanging being is incoherent.

So you have Open Theist leanings.

Definitely an Open Theist, but I'm even inclined to the idea that God develops and changes. I was influenced in this by talking with Charles Hartshorne who was a colleague here for thirty years. And he was of course big on this. And Charles liked to say that

God is perfect in the sense that God is unsurpassable by anything else but himself. And so he can get better and better. But, he develops and changes. But that new idea that you're suggesting to me, is that the thought would be, the only freedom people can have in heaven would be freedom of self-perfection, which is by the way a compatibilist freedom. But, they could also have—if the conception of heaven is what I think it ought to be if there is such a thing is one in which people earn it, and therefore they would also have in heaven what I call freedom of self-determination, because that's the freedom you have if you always act from a good will, but you have been the one who created that good will. That's a new thought I had, about that.

Sennett wants to say that's why you have to have the earth. Of course, there are all sorts of problems, like the kind we've already said, that God doesn't have this, so can it really be that great if God doesn't have it? And the second one is, what about babies that die before whenever their first SFA is, whether it be age two or earlier—what about if they die before that, are they angel automatons incapable of this kind of self-formation?

As I said, that's why I like to stay away from philosophy of religion, to the degree that I can. I have thoughts about it, my own beliefs, but I think we know as much about these things as the cavemen knew about the stars anyway, so one has to be very cautious. But, it does seem to me that Sennett's on the right track here, if we really did get into the question on heaven. It always occurred to me that the freedom God would have would be the freedom of self-perfection, and the saints in heaven, if there were such. But it never occurred to me that they would also have the freedom of self-determination as I defined it in there, just as Luther got to a point where he always did good, because that would mean they would have formed themselves, and as you nicely put it, that would be a reason for having an earth developing themselves, that's very interesting, I hadn't completely thought that through before, but I think it is quite an interesting thought. There is a big debate about this, about whether we don't have libertarian free will in heaven, and people have been taking different sides. I know Kevin Timpe and a few other people have been.

(Timothy) Pawl and (Kevin) Timpe had a paper on that ("Incompatibilism, Sin, and Free Will in Heaven," *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (4): 398–419) and they want to build on Sennett's view, but give the saints in heaven the ability to choose between singing to praise God and playing the trumpet to praise God—a limited menu.

Yeah, I see. It seems to me all these people are on the right track here. But, it's a problem beyond my scope to resolve. But I think it's a very interesting problem. There's another side of this, and that is, because I oppose the idea that free will is an all-or-nothing thing, for reasons we've given or the scientific orientation and the extent to which I have a very strong feeling we are determined by our heredity and environment, and so on, because I hold that, I reject things like my colleague (who's now my colleague but I've been in contact and interaction with his thought for many years), Galen Strawson, Peter Strawson's son, Galen is now my colleague, in fact his office is down the hall—in fact for a while he had my old office, that was a very strange experience. But, Galen had

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always talked about libertarian freedom as a quote-unquote heaven and hell freedom. But on my view, you can leave the hell out of it. I'll go with purgatory or something, but that way you wear it off, you know. But, acting good and doing good. But, hell, no way, because that's infinite—given the great limitations I've talked about in terms of our actual free will and the deeper sense of responsibility, you can see why the idea of hell as an infinite suffering for finite wrongs is way, way off base. So, I would reject that.

You're a universalist.

Well, no, universalism doesn't necessarily follow if you have a purgatorial conception.

True, but the point of purgatory is eventually you leave it.

Well, no but it might be that if evil is so great and redemption is ineffective, you just cease to exist.

Yeah there is that option.

That's a possibility. I don't know what the answer is to these things, but it's just something worth speculating about. By the way when I said that, I was thinking of Hitler..

Right, Hitler is always the one that—I saw a comedian, Bill Burr, who mused about this. He says, it's unfair on all these people who killed more than Hitler, why don't those kills count? Everybody just talks about Hitler. But, I want to do two things: one, I want to ask one more thing about plural voluntary control, and then after that I want to talk a little bit about your more recent book, which is Ethics and the Quest for Wisdom (Cambridge University Press, 2010), because there's an awful lot to say about this, it just so happens that I'm much more familiar with your free will stuff, which is why I focus on that.

I'm glad you showed that book came out in 2010, and I'm very proud of that book. I think the thoughts in it are equally important to my free will thing...

It struck me that this is sort of a throwback to your origins, because you always had these pluralistic concerns, and this is a grand theory in the kind of Spinoza tradition, which people don't do anymore.

The connection with my free will book is the idea of the pluralism of values. That there can be ambivalence—ambi-valence, so to speak—in human life, and there's a plurality of values that were working and that's the whole question pluralism of values that is so central to a lot of modern discussion of ethics, does it mean relativism or what can we do with it and that's one of the themes of my book. That's the connection between—really the only connection between my free will discussion, and this book, because I make pluralism of values crucial to my theory of free will too. But, I appreciate your comments about that book because I really like it, and I'm writing more about it. I just

wrote a paper on relating the ideas in that book to political philosophy. So, it's really an interesting topic.

Yeah, so just one more thing about plural voluntary control. So, your businesswoman example. Imagine your businesswoman, the example of your self-forming action is the choice between helping or going on to the meeting. Now, one of the reasons why I brought up the James Sennett thing is because this is supposed to be very much a moral character forming. So, the religious people who draw on your idea want to say that the self-forming actions can't just be between cauliflower and broccoli for dinner, it has to be between a good action and a bad action, there has to be real genuine moral choice. So, let's say there is that.

By the way that isn't quite true, but let's just assume it for this sake.

Right, now the way you present it is, she should endorse whichever result because there's genuine ambivalence in her self, as it were, in her will.

And both of the different conflicting emotions are very important.

Right, but certainly—which one is actualized, to use language from possible worlds talk, Alvin Plantinga likes to use that terminology—the one that is actualized in the real world as we know it, in our world, is undetermined, because of these quantum indeterminacies, so suppose it turns out—so now let's imagine—if this is my thought experiment—let's imagine these two branching selves. So, we start out with the businesswoman, and then business woman A in one world makes the right choice, or at least, because of indeterminacy, the choice that is actualized is the one where she helps.

I would not use the phrase "because of indeterminacy." There's indeterminacy involved, but you want it not to be the cause.

OK, so it's not determined by her self that she will make that choice.

It's not determined antecedently by her self, the choice she must make, but is determined by her self when she makes it.

All right, now, so in world one, let's say she makes the good choice she helps and the she becomes a super amazing person and she keeps she makes the best choice in every self-forming action, and let's say you're wrong about heaven—there is a heaven and a hell—she ends up in heaven. Whereas, in world B, she makes the wrong choice and it's the worst. So we sort of have the extremes of the tree. So, we're in one world she makes all the best choices, and the in the other she makes all the worst. Now, for the sake of argument: the difference between heavenly businesswoman and hellish businesswoman is luck. Now, and of course you're definitely opposed to that, but I'm going to present it as the most serious objection that you can then respond to. It's the same original self that results in both of these things. They both come from the

same tree and the only difference is, I want to say randomness or luck but you don't like either of those terms.

We have to avoid the conclusion that the difference is randomness, there or at any other place. Now first of all, we have to get clear here, that these would be—if you have a lot of branching trees here, where she could go in the future—if you have a lot of branching trees here, the two you gave are extreme at the outer limits. There's a lot of things in here—you know all my choices are bad and I go down to hell, and, no, no. There's a lot of things—she's got a future, and she has a chance to redeem herself. She may feel pangs of conscience when she goes on to the meeting, and resolves to change later on, and then she does have other choices later on, so we have many of these going on. And we have development over time, so these would be the extreme cases. That's the first thing to say. But, now we want to get to the basic thing here, which is that you're absolutely right, there's a thought here that it's a matter of luck. You can do it in a more elementary way as Al Mele and other critics do, by talking about the same person or their counterpart in another possible world in exactly the same situation, and one goes this way and one goes the other, and it's a matter of chance and so on and so forth. So, there's a lot of ways to put it, you put it in a very nice way. So, you've got to deal with this, this is where the whole plural voluntary control thing gets into the picture, because it looks like it's a matter of chance and therefore a matter of luck, which way person will go here if its undetermined. And this required a lot of work, for me, over the years. And I introduce at this point perhaps the most controversial feature of my view, which is that I imagine in self-forming action situations that a person is making efforts to make each of their conflicting values prevail over the other. So, that the deliberative process has subprocesses within it.

The little angel and the little devil (on each shoulder)?

Whatever, so that she really wants to go onto her meeting, and she wants to resist the temptation to help actually, because she so wants to go on to her meeting and she has to make an effort to make those motives—those ambitious motives—prevail. Some people when they talk about weakness of will always put it in a one-sided way, that you have to make an effort to make the moral thing prevail over the other, but I say we can be making an effort to make our selfish instincts prevail over our moral ones many times in life, and let's not kid ourselves about that.

Yeah, you could be saying, "Stop being a sap, you're always sabotaging your chances at promotion!"

"You're sabotaging your career here, over morality, because you have images of your mother screaming at you or something, you know, and that's silly." So, what I imagine is that there are—we are making plural efforts in self-forming choice situations. One effort caused by the motives for the moral side is being made, because efforts have to be made whenever there is resistance that has to be overcome. And in this case, there's two-way resistance in the will. Either way, well you got to have an effort—if there's two resistances to both, you have to make an effort to have either one prevail. Right, so I imagine plural efforts, here, now some people think we're not conscious of plural

“You've got to deal with this, this is where the whole plural voluntary control thing gets into the picture, because it looks like it's a matter of chance and therefore a matter of luck, which way person will go here if its undetermined. And this required a lot of work, for me, over the years. And I introduce at this point perhaps the most controversial feature of my view, which is that I imagine in self-forming action situations that a person is making efforts to make each of their conflicting values prevail over the other. So, that the deliberative process has subprocesses within it.”

efforts and I have a whole response to that. This is a theory about what may be going on underneath when we are torn in this way. It's not phenomenology, and as a matter of fact, my argument is that, if we tried to figure out what free will really was, on the surface phenomenologically or consciously, it would always appear to be a mystery as it always has in history. We have to have a theory about what's going on underneath. And, that's what I argue here.

So, that's Sellars again, you're coming back to Sellars.

I am, that's interesting, I wouldn't have thought of it that way, but indeed it is. We have to have a theory here. And that has some scientific viability. We can't prove it to be true, but the fact—in other words, we have—I postulate parallel processing in the free decision-making brain. And we know there's parallel processing on the input-side of the ledger, in perception. Why not consider parallel processing on the output side of the ledger, in deliberation, choice and action. And I say that's what we have to imagine to make sense of libertarian free will. So anyway, when we look at deliberative processes, they look like flipping a coin. "Oh well, I'm deliberating, there's thoughts on this side and thoughts on this side, and at the end it's chance. It's an indeterminism that chooses one way or the other." That seems no better than flipping a coin, right. But my thought is that's because you imagine the whole past as like a big bubble that includes everything prior to the moment, as when you define determinism. And of course it includes my whole psychological past, historically, some libertarians have tried to keep your psychological past out of it. That's dualism, right, but no way. It's in there, the whole past, same psychological past, two agents, they have exactly the same past. One of them does this, one of them does that, how could it be anything else but chance? Well, I say, put a microscope on that whole past, because that deliberative process preceding is very complex and it involves a whole host of subprocesses. And among these subprocesses, are these volitional strains, which I call efforts. You could also call them exercises of will power. And, you put the microscope on there and you see "Ah, we have these two different strains." So in the one world where you choose one thing, there's a different narrative to the story than in the other world, even though—and I don't even think the pasts are the same, because I have reasons for saying that, but I have mistakenly said that in the past. I don't think the pasts are exactly the same, they don't have to be. But, leave that aside for the moment. In one world you have the following narrative, that the person was trying to make the moral choice by resisting the temptation to do the ambitious choice, and they succeeded. And then that is very much like many examples that come down from Austin and Anscombe, where they emphasize that if you are trying to do something, like sink a putt, and you do so, even though it was undetermined, and you might have failed, you did it, you're responsible for it, it's your agency, it was done by you, even though it was undetermined. Moreover, the indeterminism, since it was internal to the effort, is not the cause because on probability theory, the cause of a probabilistic event has to raise the probability that it will occur, not lower it. And in this case the indeterminism lowers the probability that it will occur, what raises the probability is your prior motives that are inclining you to do it and the effort you're making to do it. Those things are the things that without them there'd be no chance you did it. So the indeterminism is not the cause—it's involved causally, but

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it's not the cause. It's like the vaccination that didn't prevent the disease, in probabilistic causation. So, on the narrative—on this side, you have this person struggling to overcome the selfish motives and succeeding. They're responsible, they did it. They did it voluntarily, they did it intentionally, and they certainly did it on purpose, they were making an effort to do it. And they—it was rational because the motives that caused it and brought it about were the motives for doing the moral thing—the motives for doing the other thing didn't come into it.

This sounds kind of Manichean to me, you know what I mean?

It is—well, you know that's an interesting point. You're raising a lot of points I hadn't thought about before. But this is really true, do you want to elaborate on that?

Well, you have the dark and the light are both acting within you and when you do good it's because the light won out and when you do bad it's because the dark won out.

Okay, very good. This is interesting.

Quantum Manicheanism.

Well the thing about Manicheans is—of course they put the same thing into God and the universe, you know there's the good and the evil part. But when you think about it in terms of human beings we have our bad nature and we have our good nature. And we are divided in that way. The only disagreement I would have is that the bad nature is like something that isn't me, and it does it and not me. And the good nature is something that isn't me and it does it not me. That part of the Manichean thing is not like my view here, because I am saying that it is us if we are self-formed, but even if we're making—you know, even if we are determined to have these two things, it is us because we are the ones that bring about one thing. It isn't, sort of, "Oh, it was the devil in me." That's a cop-out I think. Or you know, "It was the good in me," or whatever. So, yeah there's something Manichean here, in the sense that to be a self-forming agent and to have free will, you have to be at times—in fact, many times—in your life, a very divided person. Now one other thing you mentioned earlier that I want to speak to, is that this is not all a matter of moral versus non-moral choices. I list in my *The Significance of Free Will* (Oxford University Press, 1996) five or six different contexts. So, first of all you have the moral versus the self-interest, those are the ones that we always think about, and use as examples. But also you've got prudential choices, where you think about the long-term goals—"should I eat this pizza pie now, or have the extra drink? I'm trying to lose weight." That could be an SFA. Then there are things for which you have aversions, "Goddammit my wife wants me to mow the lawn..." Or sometimes just getting out of bed in the morning after a long, dreary night. So, things you have aversions to, and overcoming those aversions. So there's three different things that could be SFAs. But I also imagine other SFAs that are strictly practical actually, where people are making decisions: "what field should I go into, what choices of career should I make, who should I marry, should we have children?" These can be very much self-forming actions, and

“ I also imagine other SFAs that are strictly practical actually, where people are making decisions: “what field should I go into, what choices of career should I make, who should I marry, should we have children?” These can be very much self-forming actions, and they change what we will become, depending on what we choose. To have children, I mean, let's face it, makes you a different kind of person than you would be if you didn't. ”

they change what we will become, depending on what we choose. To have children, I mean, let's face it, makes you a different kind of person than you would be if you didn't.

Oh yeah.

So, this is self-formation, so I add that into the mix too. Practical choices and I use some examples there about a woman graduating from law school decided whether she wants to join a large firm in Chicago or a small firm in Austin. Well, okay, she has choices here, and there may be good reasons for each, and she's torn. But, also there are limitations on what she can choose, I mean, being a topless dancer in Seattle doesn't enter into it. You know, so you limit it, but it does determine—it will determine what firm she will go into, what sort of person she becomes too. And who you marry, and so there's five. I think I made a sixth or seventh in *Significance*, I can't remember, but at least those five different ones. So the moral ones are only one way in which we form ourselves, and I think that's important to make that point.

Okay, well, we've been talking for so long, see if you can give a five to ten minute summary of the high points of Ethics and the Quest for Wisdom, because I don't think we have time to do it justice, but I do want you to say a little bit about what you think the key ideas are here.

Right, well it's about the extent to which we can accept the idea that there are plural values, without getting into relativism, and I argue in that that there may be some values that are objectively good and objectively right. And that's of course a standard kind of thing in ethics, there's nothing new about the problem. But I approach it in a different way.

The key notions I'd like you to touch on are the moral sphere and these four dimensions.

Yeah, that's right. You see, so I introduce a version of Kant's principle of treating others as ends, I call it the "ends principle," and it defines a moral sphere. A moral sphere exists when everybody in it—maybe a small group or maybe the whole world—a moral sphere exists when it's possible for everyone to treat everyone else in that group as an end rather than a means. In other words, and I have a more elaborate account what it means to "treat as an end," it's to afford them openness respect, allowing them to pursue their purposes and their way of life without interference or subordination to you, or whatever. And, that notion of openness respect plays a key role I think also in political philosophy. But, so a moral sphere is one in which everyone in the sphere can treat everyone else with—as an end, in a sense, with openness respect. (Stephen) Darwall makes a distinction between recognition and appraisal respect. Openness respect doesn't necessarily require that you have appraisal respect. It doesn't mean that you appraise the way they live or their plans of action or what they do, and you think it's great or excellent or anything of the sort. Openness respect is a recognition respect, namely, that they have the right to live it unless of course they live their life in such a way to prevent anybody else in that sphere from doing theirs. That's where the ethical part gets into the story. A moral sphere breaks down when somebody acts in such a

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way that they make it impossible for others to pursue their plans of action and their ways of life, without interference and constraint, as well. And I go back to my—it's not exactly my businesswoman example, but it's similar: a person seeing an assault taking place in an alley. The moral reason for doing something about it is that the moral sphere has broken down in the sense in which I define it, right. This person can either walk on by, in which case there's going to be a person in that sphere, where you could have an influence that's not going to be treated with openness respect, namely the victim. If you however interfere, there's going to be someone who's not treated with openness respect, namely the perpetrator. And if the police or others come in and they stop the perpetrator it's the same thing. So the moral sphere has broken down, and it breaks down when it's impossible to treat everyone with openness respect no matter what you do. And, then the argument is the idea that when the moral sphere breaks down, the moral thing to do is to restore the moral sphere again. In this case by stopping the one who has broken it and made it impossible for everyone else to be so treated, and I think if you pursue that line, you get a whole moral theory. And, you get a good sense of morality. There's a lot more complication that has to come into it here. Now I have spheres of moral sphere breakdown. So imagine a circle in the middle, this is the moral sphere, this is where everyone can treat everyone else with respect. Some people say, Well gee, in life we're never in a moral sphere, we're always encountering—

There are assholes everywhere.

That's right. But it isn't just human conflict that counts. For example, if a repairman comes to my door and so on, in a certain sense, we are using each other as means. But, we aren't breaking the moral sphere in my sense, because he's pursuing his way of life, and what he wants, as long as he gets paid for doing his work. He's pursuing his life, and I'm pursuing mine.

I can just hear the Marxists pulling their hair out here.

Well, okay, there you go. Interesting point. It isn't just conflict here, but conflict where you are not willing to compromise, but rather force your will on the other. I talk about a neighbor here who has to work all night and sleeps during the day; the other neighbor plays in a band and he's practicing his trumpet. Okay, it's all right if they find a way: I sleep here, and you do it then. Rather than the guy runs over here and smashes the trumpet, which he might do.

If it was bagpipes, then that would be justified.

Okay. So, there are several stages of the moral sphere, and the way I put it—in the moral sphere here, everyone can treat everyone else in this way, with openness respect. The first level of moral sphere breakdown is when there's conflict, so it's quite impossible for everybody to get everything they want. This is like the neighbors here, with their horn and their whatever. And the idea in that second sphere, this is the conflict of interest sphere, is the moral sphere has clearly broken down, because both of them having trouble pursuing their way of life, as they would like. So, when the moral sphere breaks down in a conflict situation, the idea to restore it is to find compromise, which allows

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each to the degree possible to go on pursuing their plans of action, and ways of life without interference. And that's what they'd do if they find a compromise. If they can't compromise and one guy comes over and breaks the trumpet, then you move to a third sphere, and this is really where you have moral sphere breaking actions, treating persons as means. Because you have now somebody who decides to resolve the conflict by imposing their will on the other side, much as the assailant did in the alley. And they then have broken the moral sphere, made it impossible for other people involved to treat them with respect and everyone else too. And by the way, I relate this to Kant's famous murderer at the door. On this theory it's insane to tell the truth to the murderer at the door, just because he's a human being, because you have to look at what plan of action he's pursuing here. He's going to make it impossible for all of us to treat everyone—himself or the victim—as an ends here. And this is where I part company with Kant, assuming that's what he holds of course. But, my view is for example with regard to Kant is that my ends principle differs from the second form of the categorical imperative by the fact we don't owe everybody openness respect simply because they are rational beings capable of choosing their own ends. It depends on what ends they choose. They are not worthy of respect independently of the ends they choose, and if those ends make it impossible for others to pursue their own ends, then they are not worthy of respect to that degree anymore. So, when you get to that stage, you restore the sphere by stopping the person who's broken it, and then you're back to the moral sphere again. But now, I imagine at the extreme, the fourth sphere, but it isn't a sphere, is where your attempt to find compromise doesn't work, so war breaks out. That fourth sphere is basically a Hobbesian state of war.

I was going to say that this whole notion of that in some sense it's a coordination problem to create the world of morality, it sounds like a very Hobbesian project.

Interesting, that's an interesting point. I haven't thought about that, I'll have to think about that more. Of course, it's not really Hobbes, in terms of his whole political theory, and so on. But it is interesting to call it a coordination problem, it sort of is.

That the very possibility of morality is a function of coordinated activity by individuals...

Right. That's true, that's good, and I'll have to think more about that. When you get to that fourth stage, you have a Hobbesian state of nature and it may be that, if it's two countries, it may just be impossible and it's going to be war or it's going to be some kind of subordination. We see that in the world today... So that's the structure of the moral theory. And the key thing is that you're not worthy of the respect which is being granted here irrespective of how you act and whether you respect others. Now that means that worthiness of respect or being treated as an end or for moral treatment as a human being is going to depend on how you treat other human beings. That follows here. And that's really sort of my argument: if you wish to be worthy of respect, deserving of respect, you have to respect others in this way, and the degree to which you do not do that, you are not worthy of respect from them. And if you are not worthy of respect from them, you are not objectively worthy of respect, because what objective

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worthiness of respect means, is being worthy of respect from everybody no matter whether they give it to you or not. And that's what objective worth is, I have a whole chapter on the notion of objective worth. Objective worth is worth from all points of view. And, in order to have such worth, moral worth from all points of view, you have to be respectful of all other points of view, to the degree that you can. And there's your morality here, there's your justification, so to speak. You get objective worth out of this, and my chapter on objective worth is interesting because I define several kinds of it. But, it is fundamentally worth from all points of view.

Now you call this *Ethics and the Quest for Wisdom*. Do you see this as sort of a throwback to ancient philosophical concerns, is this reinvigorating philosophy as it was practiced in the Athenian square?

It is, but it is not exactly like the reversion of various virtue ethicists' theories, going back to Aristotle and so on, although I have nothing against that. Having virtues is going to be related, if you don't have certain virtues, you're not going to keep the moral sphere going here. So, I have nothing against virtue ethics, I just don't think it's the whole story. It is a reversion here, and when I give my chapter on wisdom, I say that I go back to Aristotle, and I define 'wisdom' as knowing what's worth believing about the nature of things, and that's objective reality, objective knowledge. And knowing what's worth striving for in the nature of things, that's what I call objective worth, or value, or whatever you want to call it. And, these are the true objects of ancient wisdom, as Aristotle defines it, *sophia*, in the *Metaphysics* and his other works. And so I use Aristotle here as a key to the notion of wisdom, but I don't talk necessarily about what the many ethicists call practical wisdom in Aristotle's sense, *phronesis*. That's in there, because virtue ethics, and I'm all right with that. But I'm interested in *Sophia* when I say wisdom in the title of that book. But wisdom is interested not just in objective understanding of the universe, that's metaphysics, basically, that was Aristotle's word for metaphysics, wisdom, or *sophia*, but also what's worth striving for in the nature of things. Now for Aristotle and the ancients, that converged, because if you understood the structure of nature because it was based on final causes, then you would know what was objectively worth striving for in nature. We've cut that apart here. But I'm trying to put them back together. Let's get both stages of wisdom here, objective knowledge and objective worth, and of course the ethics part is going to focus on objective worth. So, I began to ask myself, what is it to have objective worth, a kind of worth that should be recognized by everybody (whether it is or not)? For example, the truth on the epistemic side of this equation, objective knowledge of objective reality, the truth is defined as that which should be recognized as true by everybody, though clearly it isn't, that's the objective truth, that anyone who affirms it is right, and anyone who doesn't is wrong, so that it is worthy of being objectively recognized by all. And I say objective worth is of The Good and the right way of living, that's worthy of being recognized as good by all—it isn't necessarily, but it's worthy of it. It's objectively worthy. And I say that, well, leave it to science that this one here or philosophy I suppose too, because Aristotle meant that by metaphysics, but I focus on this side. And I say, following the reasoning we just went through on the moral sphere and so on, that if you want to find out what's worth striving for in the nature of things and what will make your life—whatever you

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do—objectively worthy, locate what is worthy of being recognized as being good from all points of view, and you will have found it. You must act within the moral sphere.

Well it's certainly an amazing project, but you know, it seems pretty clear to me that A.J. Ayer didn't take.

That's truly fascinating, yes indeed. I mean, logical positivism is a kind of a spur because it says all these philosophical problems are pseudo-problems. And the other thing about pluralism and value here, is—my wife has pointed this out to me—I grew up in a small New England town, outside of Boston, called Maynard, not very well known, but it's right next to Concord, Mass. And my uncle in past times was an immigrant from Italy, and my father was an immigrant from Newfoundland, but actually Ireland, but he was several generations in Newfoundland. In New England they called them "Newfies." And I once said I was Newfie in this respect, and I only met one other philosopher who claimed his ancestry was Newfie as well, and that was Quine, and he was the only other one. But in any case, my father was on that side, and my father on the Italian side owned a farm that bordered down on White Pond, so this is sort of the area I grew up in. But the main thing about Maynard is, it was cut out from all these towns, Acton, Concord, whatever, that sent militia to the Concord bridge to meet the British, in the poem and all, because there were factories there, and the Yankees wanted to keep in the outer towns which were more rural and nice, and all the immigrants kept piling into this town that was cut out of them in the middle. And that's the town I grew up in, it was a huge woolen mill (Assabet Woolen Mill) that functioned until it moved south in the fifties, you know how that went. And, there were at least twelve to fifteen different languages spoken in that town, and there was every kind of church imaginable, there were a couple of different catholic churches—a Polish one, an Irish-Italian one, and there was even some kind of synagogues, every protestant around the nation, and there was even some kind of—I don't know whether it was Eastern Orthodox, it might have even been a mosque for all I knew. But there were fifteen different languages spoken, it was pluralist. And it was very difficult because they always used to tell ethnic jokes about each other, and talk about, oh I don't know, "I can't get along with these Pollacks," or you know "these dagoes are dangerous," and all this. But there was always this line, that was spoken at a town meeting, because they had town meetings, it was New England after all. And this sort of Italian guy got up at a town meeting, and said, "Well I can't stand them, and you know and whatever." And then said, "But this is America, and we all have to learn to get along with one another." And that was the story, it was funny how they all struggled to try to make it work throughout all these different language things. My grandmother used to take me to a movie on Tuesday nights and she couldn't understand English—she was Italian—so she'd always leave fifteen minutes early before the end of the movie. I was only five, so it didn't matter. She took me down first to the Jewish grocer, and then the Italian grocer, and by the time I got to be six or seven she had to drag me out of there of course. But, it's amazing, I don't know how she communicated with the Jewish grocer. She was an Italian, and he spoke some kind of Yiddish or whatever and so on, and that's the way it was. And my wife reminded me later in life, "You know that's where you got your thing on pluralism." And I think she's absolutely right. So there you go about youth

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and history. And at the same time, I'm reading A.J. Ayer, so what a confused young man, huh?

Well it worked out well for you.

Yeah, well, anyway, it was great.