

Essay on the History of Civil Society. Edited by F. Oz-Salzberger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. An older edition of this work, edited by D. Forbes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966), contains a valuable introduction; there is also a modern German translation edited by H. Medick (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988).

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FREE WILL. The problem of "free will" (see WILL) has generally been interpreted in modern times in terms of the question of whether or not moral freedom and responsibility are compatible with causality and determinism. Philosophers in the empiricist tradition have defended, with remarkable consistency, a compatibilist position on this issue. Moreover, most of the major figures of the empiricist tradition are understood to have endorsed and contributed to a single, unified strategy on this subject. The philosophers concerned include, most prominently, HOBBS, LOCKE, HUME, MILL, RUSSELL, Schlick, and AYER. (BERKELEY is a notable exception to the generalization that empiricists have supported the compatibilist position.) The position that these philosophers developed reflects, in large measure, the "antimetaphysical" (see METAPHYSICS) and naturalistic (see NATURALISM) orientation of empiricist philosophy. The two most basic elements in the classical empiricist-compatibilist strategy concern their interpretation of "freedom" and their account of "causal necessity" (see CAUSATION). The fundamental claim is that incompatibilism is a product of (related) confusions concerning both these aspects of the "free will" problem. It is argued, moreover, that erroneous incompatibilist conclusions have encouraged the (obscure) metaphysical system building that characterizes the "libertarian" or "free will" position. In this way, there are a positive, constructive aspect and a negative, destructive aspect to classical empiricist-compatibilism. On one hand, it aims to articulate and defend a plausible account of freedom and responsibility, and, on the other hand, it seeks to discredit "free will" metaphysics and expose the confusions that lead to it. Historically, the most influential figures in the empiricist-compatibilist tradition are Hobbes and Hume. These two thinkers are generally taken to have laid the foundations of the classical strategy. Hobbes argued that "a free agent is he that can do if he will, and forbear if he will; and that liberty is the absence of

external impediments" (*Works* IV: 275-76). On this understanding of freedom—what Hume refers to as "liberty of spontaneity" (*Treatise*: 407)—an agent is free so long as she is able to act according to the *determination* of her own will. Freedom of this kind is opposed to force or compulsion, such as when a prisoner cannot escape because of the external constraints on her actions (e.g., chains, bars, etc.). This kind of freedom ("spontaneity") is to be contrasted with a freedom that presupposes the absence of causes and necessity—what Hume terms "liberty of indifference" (*Treatise*: 407—compare Hobbes's *Works* IV: 261). Hume maintains that "liberty of indifference" has no existence and that it is not what we ordinarily mean by liberty. "Liberty of spontaneity"—freedom to act without external constraint—captures our everyday understanding of free-

dom. Clearly, then, properly understood, the conditions of freedom involve the absence of any (external) obstacles to *action*. Free action is *caused* by the will of the agent. Failing this, the behavior in question is a product of external causes (i.e., causes other than the agent's desires and willings) and is thus unfree. The distinction between free and unfree action, therefore, depends not on the presence or absence of causation but rather on the *type* of cause that gives rise to it. It follows that it is a mistake to suppose that freedom requires the absence of causation. On the contrary, free action must be caused by the agent, and, hence, freedom *requires* causation.

The question arises, in light of this, why so many philosophers have supposed that (moral) freedom requires the absence of causation and necessity (i.e., "liberty of indifference"). Hume's famous and influential explanation for this is that confusion about the nature of freedom has its roots in misunderstanding about the nature of causation and necessity (*Treatise*: 407, 409-10; *Enquiry*: 93-94, 97; compare Ayer: 21-22). Freedom properly understood—liberty of spontaneity—does require the absence of any force or compulsion. Traditional metaphysical views of causation, however, seem to imply that causes (somehow) compel or force their effects to occur. It would seem to follow from this, that if our actions are caused, then they cannot be free—because they would then be forced or compelled to occur. Causation and necessity, Hume maintains, are simply a matter of constant conjunction or the regular union of like objects. On the basis of such regularities we are able to make inferences from causes to effects. In the case of human conduct, our experience of certain characters serves as a basis for making inferences as to how these individuals will act in given circumstances or conditions. None of this, however, implies that the actions of these agents were in any way forced or compelled to occur. In short, confusion about the nature of causal necessity has led to confusion about the conditions of moral freedom. With this confusion eliminated, we can conclude that there is no conflict between freedom and necessity.

The preceding account of the conditions of free action serves to explain why the alternative conception of freedom—"liberty of indifference"—must be rejected. Defenders of "free will" (i.e., "libertarians") maintain that moral

freedom requires that our actions are not caused or necessitated. Empiricist-compatibilists argue that this is obviously an inadequate basis for moral responsibility. If our actions are uncaused, then they are merely chance occurrences—lacking *any* explanation. Occurrences of this kind would “just happen,” rather than being brought about or produced by some cause. However, actions that just happen cannot be attributed to an agent or to anyone or anything else. Moreover, the effectiveness of rewards and punishments—which are essential to moral life and society—depends on the fact that these motives *cause* agents to act in some ways and not others. Accordingly, it is evident that freedom understood in terms of “indifference” would make both morality and society impossible (Hume, *Treatise*: 411; *Enquiry*: 98; Ayer: 18).

Empiricist-compatibilist concern with the effectiveness of rewards and punishments indicates that there are important (historical) links between this strategy and utilitarian moral theory. This linkage is apparent in the work of both Hobbes and Hume, but it is especially clear in the work of Schlick (who was a leading member of the Vienna Circle). According to Schlick, all concern with “backward-looking” considerations such as *desert* and *retribution* is based on a combination of metaphysical confusion and a primitive desire for vengeance (compare Hobbes, *Works* IV: 255–56). Responsibility, however, should be understood in terms of the effectiveness of praise and blame, rewards and punishments, with a view to altering an agent’s conduct in socially desirable ways. These sorts of (forward-looking) considerations, it is argued, explain the general rationale of excusing considerations. The reason we do not condemn or punish individuals who act in ignorance or accidentally or who are mentally disabled or disturbed is that in these circumstances these practices are ineffective and thus unjustified.

Although Hume is generally regarded as the leading representative of classical compatibilism, his own strategy differs from it in important respects. On the classical interpretation, Hume’s effort to “reconcile” liberty and necessity is essentially *conceptual* in nature. That is, Hume is understood to be primarily concerned to remove certain “verbal” obstacles regarding the meaning of (the terms) “liberty” and “necessity”—obstacles that stand in the path of his (independent) project of a “science of man.” Although this understanding of Hume’s intentions has been widely accepted and hugely influential, it nevertheless overlooks the most interesting and important aspect of his general strategy—and in doing so misrepresents the nature of his arguments. More specifically, Hume was concerned to *describe* the circumstances under which people are *felt* to be responsible (this was a particularly important aspect of his “science of man”). The key element in this account is the workings of moral sentiment. The moral sentiments, Hume holds, operate according to the more general principles of the mechanism of the indirect passions (e.g., love and hate). Hume’s account of the way in which “liberty” and “necessity” are essential to ascriptions of responsibility must be understood within the framework of his naturalistic account of how the moral sentiments are generated. For this reason his

"reconciliation" strategy needs to be interpreted in terms of his naturalistic commitments, rather than in terms of conceptual analysis.

The naturalistic interpretation of Hume's compatibilism brings his position much closer to the recent influential work of P. F. Strawson on this subject ("Freedom and Resentment") and distinguishes it sharply from the more orthodox line of Hobbes and Schlick. Hume's naturalistic approach suggests that a proper understanding of the "free will" problem must be grounded in a more adequate (empirical) account of the role of human emotion in this sphere. This contrasts with the classical strategy's emphasis on the conceptual analysis of "freedom" as the basis of any adequate account of the conditions of moral responsibility. However, although Hume's naturalism suggests an approach that is quite distinct from the classical strategy, it nevertheless remains faithful to empiricism's more general anti-libertarian and compatibilist orientation.

The critical issue that separates compatibilists and incompatibilists was well captured by Hobbes in the following terse statement: "Again in the whole question of free-will is included in this, 'Whether the will determine itself?' " (*Works* V: 4). Hobbes maintained that the notion of free will (i.e., a person having the power to determine his own will, as opposed to freedom to act according to its dictates) was *absurd* (compare *Works* V: 450-51). Moral freedom is nothing more than freedom of *action*; it does not require any further (incoherent) notion of free will. Two of the great attractions of this position are its simplicity and the (apparent) clarity of its metaphysical commitments. The position, however, suffers from a number of well-known difficulties. Contemporary compatibilists, for example, generally acknowledge that the classical "solution" fails to account for the sort of "freedom" that distinguishes rational, responsible adults from children and animals. Similarly, it is widely recognized that it is necessary to account for "internal barriers" to moral freedom and responsibility (e.g., compulsive desires). In light of these deficiencies in the classical "solution," contemporary compatibilists generally agree that the most pressing task at present is to explain how agents can be said to be in control of their character and will in a way that is consistent with a naturalistic and necessitarian framework (compare Dennett, *Elbow Room*). These developments in contemporary compatibilism—along with efforts to naturalize our understanding of moral responsibility (i.e., in the manner suggested by Hume and Strawson)—certainly constitute a sophisticated advance in the general position. However, they in no way abandon traditional empiricist doubts about the metaphysics of libertarianism, nor do they in any way compromise the more fundamental commitment to compatibilism itself.

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