

# The Problem of Freewill

Blatchford, Robert, *Not Guilty*

# Two Common Sense Beliefs

- **Freewill Thesis:** some (though not all) of our actions are performed freely
  - we examine and deliberate about our options
  - we **choose** which of the options suits us best, thereby acting freely
- **Determinism:** all events are caused and governed by laws
  - This includes all of human action
  - Science (physics, psychology) presupposes and searches for these laws
- **Freewill Problem:** Freewill and Determinism appear to be incompatible
  - Freedom requires that we can do otherwise i.e. choose
  - Determinism requires that we could not have done otherwise than we did

# Free will Problem

Here is one way of putting the apparent problem

1. if our actions are free then we could have done otherwise [freedom]
2. if all actions are caused then we could not have done otherwise [determinism]
3. So, it can't be both true that our actions are free and all actions are caused

# Three Views on Freewill

View / Thesis	Hard-Determinism	Libertarianism	Compatibilism
Freewill	N	Y	Y
Determinism	Y	N	Y

- Incompatibilism: freedom and determinism are not compatible
  - Hard-Determinism: no action is free
  - Libertarianism: some actions are free, but not caused
- Compatibilism: freedom and determinism are compatible

# Demon Hypothesis

- Laplace's (1749-1827)
- **Demon Hypothesis:** with a complete knowledge of every particle in the universe at some point in time, an all knowing demon could predict (calculate) all future events
- Determinism entails that sufficient knowledge of the laws and the state of the world means that future states can be exactly known

# Kinds of Determinism

- Science searches for causes and effects and formulates necessary laws
- Newton's Laws of Motion govern all events by three principles
  1. Every object in motion remains in that state unless acted on by an external force
  2.  $\text{Force} = m * a$
  3. For every event, there is an equal or opposite reaction
- Psychological Laws: Laws about behavioral patterns or mental patterns
  - Behavior is caused by unconscious sexual desires that go back to childhood
  - Social environment and social conditioning (Skinner)
- Some scientific laws are probabilistic
  - E.g. If a person has some gene then they are more likely to be diabetic
  - For the moment, we can simply assume that we are dealing with deterministic laws

# Blatchford's Hard-Determinism

- **Determinism:** heredity (genetics) and environment determine all human actions
- **Freedom =df** acting contrary to heredity and environment
- **Argument**
  1. A free action =df an action that is contrary to heredity and environment
  2. No action is contrary to heredity and environment
  3. So, no action is free; freewill is an illusion

# Consequences of Hard Determinism

- What follows from Hard-Determinism?
- No one is blameworthy
  - the insane are not blameworthy, because their actions are outside their control
  - Because no one controls their own heredity (genetics) or social environment, all our actions are beyond our control
  - Similarly, no one is blameworthy for something `wrong' that they did
- No one is praiseworthy
  - the beautiful are not praiseworthy, because born beautiful is beyond their control
  - Similarly, no one is praiseworthy for something good that they did, because it is also beyond their control
- People, their characters, and their actions are fortunate or unfortunate

# Objection: Blatchford goes too far?

- If we have no control of our actions then actions are no blameworthy or praiseworthy.
- But, what does that mean for the rest of morality? Is there no moral responsibility? Is there any point to moral and political institutions?
- One task for a hard-determinist is to salvage as much of this as possible
- Even though agents are not blameworthy we can, perhaps, still make sense of some moral notions
  - Prevention of repeat bad action
  - Prevention of others acting badly
  - Revenge
  - Encouragement
  - Discouragement

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- Suppose Jones kills an innocent person, and bystanders get angry
- Blatchford:
  - Jones is not blameworthy, because his action was determined by heredity and social environment beyond his control.
  - The bystanders too are causally determined to get angry, and even put Jones in jail. They are blaming Jones, but Jones is not blameworthy because the action is beyond his control
- Can the bystanders legitimately put Jones in jail?
  - View 1: Yes, they can. Reason: to prevent Jones from killing
  - View 2: No, they cannot. Reason: there is no good reason to prevent Jones or others from killing again because these actions are not blameworthy. If they are not blameworthy, then we
    - Objection: but why would the bystanders want to prevent Jones from killing again, if all killing (being causally determined) is not blameworthy?