

Compatibilism updated: Vihvelin

Vihvelin surveys the different moves in the debate by outlining deductive arguments for different positions. I'll restrict myself largely to commenting on these arguments.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM. It's not clear how the impossibilist might argue for his position. On the face of it, it is too strong. You might simply replicate the commonsensical conception of free will and claim that it is instantiated in some possible world. The question will remain whether it is so in our actual world. Historically, as we saw, theorists never asked a modal question, but only asked a question about the actual status of free will. Their arguments appealed to our understanding of what we *are*, not what we or some other creatures could be. Thus it's also not clear why the impossibilist should endorse his position.

Incompatibilists, and perhaps compatibilists too, paint themselves into a corner for another reason. If their view is not an idle speculation about the logical space, they have to say that the actual world is deterministic. But this is not at all easy to claim. Moreover, the world may be indeterministic, but free will may still be absent. By focussing on the question of determinism incompatibilists and compatibilists alike risk to be sidetracked by an issue that may be no less difficult to resolve and which may even be irrelevant to the reality of free will.

RULES OF THE DEBATE. A couple of quick points. (i) To focus on the role of determinism is to make this debate about determinism, as much as it is about free will. For example, the incompatibilist is supposed to agree that there is free will in an indeterministic merely possible world. This follows also from the claim that determinism is contingent. But (ii) it's not clear that, e.g., Leibniz would or should concede this point, or that Hobbes would in any way be interested in it to begin with. As we slide into the discussion of determinism and metaphysical necessity, the traditional positions can't be accounted for.

FATALISM. Note that, as Vihvelin explains, realism about the future (RF) does not follow from any premiss of determinism, but rather from the idea that truth values of the statements about the future are timeless. The fixity of the past is of the same nature as the fixity of the future. That's the statement (4) in the (1)–(7) fatalist argument. We'll address this claim in more detail later.

CLARENCE DARROW. On the face of it, Vihvelin's first rendering of the Clarence Darrow argument is odd. We were told that it was about hard determinism. But where is even the mention of determinism? I suppose the explanation is that Vihvelin doesn't think that determinism can be read into Clarence Darrow remarks at all, and that it is wholly about self-making. Still, in 310 she implies that this first rendering *is* supposed to be about hard determinism. I don't see why.

Vihvelin's objection to the first version of the Clarence Darrow argument must be understood against the background of Clarence Darrow's quote. We don't make our own parents, of course, but on the face of it, we make our own gardens etc.

Vihvelin then gives an impossibilist reading of the Clarence Darrow argument. But again, why is it impossibilist if possibilities aren't even mentioned?

The key is to understand premiss (2) in all three versions. In the run-up to the third version Vihvelin argues that in some indeterministic worlds we do have 'ultimate' control over our characters. Well, which worlds, exactly? Presumably the worlds with free will, and not merely the worlds with quantum indeterminacy. Suppose we identify free will with reasoning. So in these worlds, she says, some actions are caused by us. But this doesn't follow, since the issue is the *ultimate* control over what we are. And there is no such thing as ultimate control in principle. This is the proof of the *metaphysical* impossibility of free will. Hence the Clarence Darrow argument is an argument for impossibilism.

I think that this is a plausible interpretation of what Darrow and d'Holbach were up to—but not quite accurate.

REFLECTIONS. Consider what happens in deterministic worlds. There too we may allow that we have reasoning abilities: for all we know, our world is deterministic, and we do have reason here. Do we then have free will? If Vihvelin's earlier remark about indeterminism and ultimate control holds, and if we distinguish between determinism and indeterminism on the grounds of ultimate *control*, then we want to say: in deterministic worlds free will is not effective. It is not really a *will*, since something else—namely, material causes—created our character, our actions, and the rest. In the deterministic worlds there is at best an illusion of free will.

What of the indeterministic worlds with free will? We assume that free will is effective there, so it is really a *will*. But it operates with the materials handed to it. So here too, according to impossibilism, we have an illusion of free will.

I think that Vihvelin would like to accuse the impossibilist of making unreasonable demands. *Of course*, there is always something we have to work with. Only an eternal immaterial being could be thought as entirely self-created. But at least in the indeterministic worlds I can effectively decide, wholly on my own, what to do with the materials available to me.

Well, the impossibilist attacks precisely 'decide' and 'wholly on my own'. How I decide, on any given occasion, is already given to me. It is not itself something that I'm choosing 'freely'. Indeed, if I were to choose freely also the criteria of my choice, this would involve a regress.

Thus, far from making general claims about self-made beings, an impossibilist like Darrow or d'Holbach simply urges us to see into the origins of our choices and volitions. This claim was mixed up with determinism, by those authors themselves, but it needn't be.

COMPATIBILISM BY DISPOSITIONS. A person has a narrow ability to ϕ if, for whatever reason, he has a disposition to ϕ . Such a disposition may well be deterministic. A person has a wide ability to ϕ if he has a narrow ability to ϕ and the circumstances allow him to exercise this ability. Roughly, I am widely able to walk if I am capable of walking (=narrow ability), and I have an opportunity to walk.

The basic notion that has to be explicated is 'narrow ability'. It is the notion of what it takes to be able to act. Vihvelin argues for ABD: she cashes out narrow ability for action in terms of dispositions. The defence of ABD proceeds in two stages. (1) Vihvelin argues that people have dispositions just like inanimate objects. (2) The objections to ABD are not tenable.

Begin with the latter, and consider Vihvelin's response to van Inwagen. He claimed in effect that in order to act you have to have an agential power, *you* have to produce the action, you have to be the author of your action (compare Schopenhauer). You can't just be someone to whom things happen. Vihvelin replies that 'it is hard to deny etc.' But look closer: why *can't* we deny that it is in our *power* to walk (say)? why is walking under our *control*? This claim rests on some kind of introspective evidence. But as Schopenhauer taught us, we can challenge this evidence. In fact, it's the opposite: what we can't deny (says Schopenhauer) is that we are authors of our actions. Introspective evidence, if that's what Vihvelin relies on, points in the direction of agent-causation.

In fact, we might say more: ABD is wrong-headed, because if the acting ability were to consist in having dispositions, then a glass would also have been said to 'act'. We don't speak this way precisely because we don't think of the glass as having 'agency'.

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