

Kane part 2

Kane's theory of free will and MR:

BASIC SETUP

MR requires libertarian free will, and that means--

The agent must be in some way the source of or in control of his/her own reasons, motives, and purposes.

Implication: indeterminism must be in the picture somewhere, to avoid the result that our motivational structures are determined by outside factors.

The agent's actions have to be guided by the agent's reasons, motives, and purposes.

Implication: if the agent were to change his/her reasons, motives, and purposes change, the resulting action could change. That is, there are genuine alternative possibilities in the agent's future course of action.

So, libertarian free will implies the ability to do otherwise. But the reverse is not the case: the ability to do otherwise does not imply libertarian free will, because mere indeterminism without reasons, motives, or purposes would give one the ability to do otherwise.

THE BIG CHALLENGE

Can any theory of MR and free will meet the above conditions?

One central problem: indeterminism about some choices is required by the basic setup. Indeterminism sounds like chance. But how can the agent be the source of anything, or be responsible for anything that comes about by chance? Suppose my actions are guided by my reasons, etc., but I have that motivational structure just by chance. That doesn't seem to make me MR. It doesn't seem to make me the source.

One common libertarian strategy is to go for an extra kind of causation that lies outside the laws of nature. Agent-causation is the most popular. See O'Connor.

Kane does not like this strategy because

It pictures us as outside the realm of scientific explanation. (I'd put it this way: agent-causal theories of this sort make us supernatural.)

It raises very difficult questions about how this special sort of causation works. (We'll see what some of these are when we read O'Connor.)

So, Kane wants a theory of free choice that keeps human beings natural (operating in accord with the laws of nature) and yet is indeterministic.

He also wants a theory that has these naturalistic human beings be the ultimate source of their own motivational structures. But he doesn't want to propose that agents "cause" things in some odd sense of "cause".

He also wants to make sure that our motivational structures guide our free actions for which we are responsible.

KANE'S SOLUTION

There are just some very crucial actions (I think he should say choices) that are undetermined. These are choices that are made when we are torn about what choice to make, and struggle. Then we decide, we choose one way rather than the others.

Kane suggests what is going on in the brain in such cases is a combination of great sensitivity to small changes in brain state, where chance firings of neurons will result in something coming to mind. He is relying on a combination of chaos and quantum theories in physics. This allows him to say that quantum chance micro-events can get magnified by the chaotic conditions of the brain, so as to produce a noticeable and significant result.

All this brain stuff represents actual weighing of reasons, motives, purposes that the agent has at the time, and then deciding on the basis of that motivational structure. The crucial idea seems to be that

- the choice is not determined in advance by prior brain states, thoughts, etc., because of the quantum indeterminacy in the brain

- when the choice is made, the person makes it, through the exertion of effort; it doesn't just happen while the agent sits back and waits

- but when this happens the person isn't eliminating the quantum indeterminacy through some special kind of causation (since that would be agent-causation)

- when the choice is made, it resolves the inner conflict within the motivational structure, but not by ignoring the motivational structure

-the choice will reflect the person's own decision about what to do, based on the way they see their reasons

-the resulting brain state will reflect the decision that is made (it will no longer be in the super-sensitive chaotic condition in which quantum indeterminacy can be magnified)

-the indeterminism does not cause the choice; the person makes the choice, but it isn't caused

-the indeterminism represents an obstacle to making the choice; it arises because of competing motives in the agent, and is only by exerting effort that the choice can be made

-but the indeterminism is what makes the choice free, giving room to the agent to decide without being caused to decide one way rather than the other; in this way indeterminism grounds the alternate possibilities that Kane believes are necessary for free will

-this amount of complexity of decision-making is possible only in creatures with very complex motivational structures in which conflicting reasons are weighed and various kinds of considerations come into play, and so it does not occur in other animals

-there is an element of arbitrariness in a free choice of this sort; Kane prefers to call such choices "value experiments" in which the agent has to wait for the future to see how well the choice works out

-the fact that the agent in these cases does not have conclusive reasons for choosing one way rather than the other, and simply ends up choosing (somewhat arbitrarily) does not mean that there were NO grounds for the choice; the agent's motivational structure is not ignored—it just doesn't decide the case one way or the other

These choices are the SFA's that Kane uses as a basis for MR.

The person is responsible for an SFA.

SFA's establish "character traits" or habits, or patterns. (Perhaps the brain connections are altered as a result. That would fit with current neuroscience.)

Future choices might be actually determined by the patterns established by SFA's. A person would be MR for their choices in those cases because they were responsible for the moral character that SFA's developed in them.

