

Fischer notes 2

**Section 6–three libertarian arguments for incompatibilism between MR and determinism**

The incompatibilist may claim:

- 1) Determinism rules out the possibility that people are “agents” in the sense required for MR. Maybe this means that the deterministic picture of people reduces them to interacting systems of neurons and muscles and other mechanical stuff, so that the PERSON disappears.
- 2) Determinism rules out the possibility that people are active; it makes people appear to be entirely passive. It makes it seem as though things just happen to them. I didn’t notice Fischer putting it this way, but sometimes I think this point is made by claiming that if determinism is true, people are just pawns or puppets.
- 3) Determinism rules out the possibility that people are the ultimate source of their actions. F. worries that this might actually be a demand for total control – that is, unless one has total control over one’s actions, one cannot be MR with respect to those actions.

Fischer’s responds to each of these. Do you understand his responses? Are they convincing? I suggest that the diver analogy near the end of the section is worth paying attention to.

## **Section 7: Why semi-compatibilism deals with the Consequence Argument better than Standard Compatibilism**

Remember the difference between semi-compatibilism and standard compatibilism.

Fischer begins this section with a claim that semi-compatibilism is not threatened by the Consequence Argument. I think he is right. Why?

Look back at the notes containing the three versions of the Consequence Argument. Look at the third version—the one that concludes that if determinism is true, no one controls their own behavior. That would be the version of the Consequence Argument that is relevant now. I claim it is not valid. In fact I think it is pretty obviously not valid. (Or, if you include the transfer of powerless principle as a premiss in the argument, then the argument is valid, but not sound.)

See if you agree.

But didn't Fischer say earlier that he thought the Consequence Argument was sound? What's going on?

(Hint: which version of the Consequence Argument was he talking about?)

I suggest that we skip over the remainder of this Section, since Fischer here presupposes some prior acquaintance with the debate between standard compatibilists and his semi-compatibilism.

The Reader's Digest version of this (which actually is important, but not readily available, in my view, from the reading):

The standard compatibilist has to do something about the Kane version of the Consequence Argument, because the standard compatibilist wants to say that determinism does NOT conflict with "free will" (where that includes the ability to do otherwise). The Consequence Argument threatens this standard compatibilist view.

Standard compatibilists have adopted various strategies for getting out of the Kane version of the Consequence Argument. Perhaps these strategies fit into two categories:

- 1) Assert that the agent CAN do otherwise in many cases, if the agent wants to. In other words, even if determinism is true, the agent still would do otherwise if the agent were to choose to do otherwise. Determinism does not destroy the effectiveness of the agent's making a choice. Thus, the argument is invalid.

This strategy then generates a debate over what “can” means in the conclusion of the argument, when the argument says that the agent cannot do otherwise. Does it mean the agent can do otherwise if he/she wants to, or does it mean it is physically possible for the agent to do otherwise, keeping everything else in the past fixed? Kane argued in his chapter that it has to mean the latter, since the former is not enough to ground MR. Some standard compatibilists like Hume disagree. If Kane is right, this standard compatibilist strategy fails.

Basically, as I see it, Fischer thinks that this strategy is not persuasive to most people, since most do not think the Humean reading of “can” is appropriate here.

2) Assert that the argument is unsound because it has one or more false premisses, not because it is invalid. The argument’s premisses assert that we cannot now change the past and we cannot now change the laws of nature. Some standard compatibilists say that one or both of these assertions is false.

To make this seem plausible at all, rather technical issues about the possibility of present control over the past are raised. Just to give a taste, here is an example that you might find surprising: one might say that by my now choosing X, I now make it true yesterday that in the next day I will choose X. Here is another example: since the true laws of nature describe patterns that are never broken, if I now choose X, I thereby place a constraint on what laws of nature can be true, since any true law of nature will have to accommodate my choice.

From these two examples, perhaps you can see that the idea that we now can have control over the past might not be impossible after all. Fischer is not convinced that this makes possible the right sort of control over the past.

### **Section 8: the heart of Fischer’s own view about the right sort of control to ground MR**

The key is “reasons-responsive” guidance control over one’s actions, where that reasons-responsive psychological structure is “owned” by the agent – that is, the psychological structure (which Fischer calls a “mechanism”) is the agent’s own, rather than one that belongs to someone else.

The notion of being reasons-responsive is important and interesting. Let’s talk about it.

The notion of being the agent’s own is also crucial to the position, and causes lots of trouble. Here is where the usual trouble for compatibilism creeps into Fischer’s account: how to draw the line between causes that destroy the agent’s responsibility and those that simply work through the agent’s natural capacities to produce choices that the agent is responsible for.

