

Section 4

It is important that we know that we have libertarian free will if we're going to punish people on the basis of that premise (as we now do). So, keeping MR based on the POSSIBILITY that we have libertarian freedom when we really don't have good evidence that we do is not acceptable (immoral?).

Vargas is not convinced that any well-developed libertarian theory has been shown to be incoherent or self-contradictory. That means he disagrees with some students in this class who think that Kane's version is contradictory because of the arbitrariness problem.

Instead, V. has two related lines of attack on all versions of libertarianism:

- A) Libertarianism is more implausible than the opposite view, on general epistemological grounds.
- B) There is no good empirical evidence in its favor.

If these lines of attack simply make it questionable whether libertarian free will (and thus MR) exists, then it is wrong (unjust?) to sometimes treat people badly on the basis of this questionable theory about human agency.

A

1) Implausibility of all libertarian theories of free will

Libertarianism in all its versions requires that indeterminism affect our choice-making in "very particular ways" at "very particular times", while determinist theories of choice-making do not require that the world behave in very special ways during our choice-making. Thus, there is a prima facie implausibility to libertarianism. This could be overridden only if there is some independent reason to think that indeterminism does in fact sometimes occur in the special ways during choice-making that libertarianism requires.

My Analogy:

Suppose we accept the biological theory of human evolution from non-human species as having been quite well-established by scientific evidence. Suppose we also accept a common religious idea that humans, unlike other animals, have non-physical, scientifically undetectable, immortal souls that constitute their core being, and that separate from the body at death to live on in a spiritual realm. We may then ask at what point in the gradual evolutionary process did these souls get attached to pre-humans so as to make them into full-fledged humans?

Doesn't it seem implausible to suppose that the natural processes of evolution suddenly were supplemented by a soul-infusion process just in the case of human beings? Isn't it more plausible to suppose that if humans evolved, the processes

by which they evolved were the same as the processes by which other species evolved?

The only thing that could make it more plausible to think that something very unique happened in the case of human evolution is if there is something we can point to that we know about human beings that requires this. For example, suppose there were some strong independent evidence for the existence of human souls. Then we would be “forced” to say that at some point in the evolutionary process souls must have started getting hooked up with animal bodies.

But so long as we don’t have INDEPENDENT good reasons to think there are souls, it is highly implausible to assert that the usual evolutionary mechanisms are inadequate to explain human evolution and so something very special must have happened in the evolutionary process when humans evolved. And, by the way, it wouldn’t be a good independent reason to just insist that humans are obviously very special, and that human dignity requires immortal souls.

(Of course, those who hold soul theories dear do in fact believe there are such independent good reasons for believing in souls. That is irrelevant to the analogy here.)

So, Vargas is claiming that it is just as implausible to assert that human choice-making is free in the libertarian sense, without any strong independent reason for believing that libertarian free will exists in humans. And, I would say, merely claiming that human dignity requires it, or MR requires it, doesn’t count as a good independent reason. Even if you could convince me that MR fails completely if we lack libertarian freedom, and that without MR society crumbles, havoc reigns, everyone is depressed, etc., that still would not show that there is good reason to believe that libertarian freedom is real. (It might be good reason to try to foster the illusion that libertarian freedom is real.)

2) Implausibility of Kane’s version

Kane’s theory of SFA’s requires very particular and specific ways that indeterminism must occur during the brain activity that results in free choice-making. In the absence of some evidence that any of this does in fact occur, the complex story seems implausible. (See above for the argument.)

B

But, doesn’t all the implausibility go away if there is some good independent reason to think that the libertarian story about free will is true? Yes, but, there is no evidence of that sort, and in fact the empirical evidence goes against it.

Brain science so far does not support Kane's picture of quantum indeterminacy being magnified by neuronal activity.

Brain science so far suggests that deterministic models are appropriate (even if the brain is a chaotic system).

Vargas concludes that there is no independent evidence in favor of libertarian free will, and that libertarian theories of free will are implausible. He completely ignores what Ross calls the best available empirical evidence in favor of libertarian free will: the introspected "feeling" of freedom when we make choices. So, for an assessment of that evidence, return to Ross, who tries to make a case for it. Or make your own case.

Vargas will continue his project assuming that he has shown that libertarianism has little plausibility.

Section 5

This section seems not very exciting to me. Simply review the situation so far and you'll see what V. wants to accomplish here. So far...

The common conception of MR requires agents to have libertarian free will
But belief in libertarian free will is implausible.

It would be easy to conclude that the most reasonable view is Pereboom's – give up on MR. But it might be more reasonable simply to adopt an altered conception of MR that does not require libertarian free will.

What would make that course of action more reasonable? If it could be shown that "there is justification for the responsibility characteristic practices, attitudes, and beliefs" that we presently have. [top, p 148]

Section 6

I'm guessing that Vargas wrote this section because he knows that one might react to the point above by saying that his project is hopeless. One might say that without libertarian free will there simply cannot be any justification for our present MR-related beliefs, practices, and attitudes. E.g., the morally-relevant reactive attitudes that Strawson talks about cannot be justified w/o libertarian free will, one might say.

So, Vargas wants to raise doubts about the importance of libertarian free will. He cannot claim that our common conception of MR does not require libertarian free will. But he can point to the existence of other features of our common conception and how we justify our common practices and attitudes related to MR.

In my view, that's why he turns in this section to talk about CONTROL. Remember – the consequence argument does NOT show that CONTROL and DET are incompatible. It only shows that DET and libertarian free will are incompatible. So, IF we can justify MR-related practices and attitudes by citing agent's CONTROL over their actions, that would give us a justification for those practices and attitudes that would not run afoul of DET.

(This is presumably closely related to why Fischer centers on having the right kind of control as the key to MR. But Vargas can't agree with Fischer that this will yield MR exactly as we commonly conceive of it. However, he can argue that a view like Fischer's will give us a justification for much of our common practices and attitudes.)

Vargas' basic claim in this Section:

Suppose you have an agent who possesses various complex control capacities such as the capacity to be sensitive to and responsive to stimuli, the capacity to make decisions, the capacity to predict what effects his/her behavior will have. [top p 150] Vargas could have profited from adding some more capacities from Fischer's list, like reasons-responsiveness in decision-making. So, put all those capacities together.

Note that none of these capacities requires indeterminism. So, an agent can have complex and interesting control capacities without having libertarian free will.

Now, add to the picture of this agent the fact that the agent's capacities can sometimes be exercised indeterministically. Vargas claims that adding this fact fails to add to the agent's control.

Vargas could have, but did not, go back to the thought that many in the class had in discussing Kane: adding indeterminism to the agent's situation seems, if anything, to undermine the agent's control.