

Determinism, Chance and Freedom

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Abstract

After a brief but necessary characterization of the notion of determinism, I discuss and critically evaluate four views on the relationship between determinism and free will by taking into account both (i) what matters most to us in terms of a free will worth-wanting and (ii) which capacities can be legitimately attributed to human beings without contradicting what we currently know from natural sciences. The main point of the paper is to argue that the libertarian faces a dilemma: on the one hand, the possibility of “doing otherwise” – a necessary condition of a free will according to the libertarian – requires indeterminism or chance, but any kind of indeterminism has the undesirable consequence of separating our actions from our character and our past. On the other hand, if our character has to be fully expressed by our actions, determinism becomes necessary and we seem to be metaphysically unfree. I conclude by showing that the dispute between compatibilists and libertarians possesses an important but hitherto very neglected pragmatic component as well, dependent on two different ethical attitudes toward a meaningful life.

Keywords: Determinism, Free Will, Chance

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