11. See James G. Williams, ed., *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), or Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995).
12. Bailie, 44.
13. Alison, 44.
14. Alison, 46–47.
15. Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Transforming Our Days: Spirituality, Community and Liturgy in a Technological Culture* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 92.
16. See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).
17. Mark Searle, "Serving the Lord with Justice," unpublished lecture at Dominican Chapel/Marywood, Grand Rapids, MI (19 April 1986).

Compatibilism Irrational

J. C. O'Neill

That the two theses of compatibilism (free will; determinism) are incompatible is hard to show. However, compatibilists always incorporate three irrational moves into their arguments, by committing an endless regress, by begging the question, by asserting without evidence. Each of these moves can be shown to be tolerable in the short run, but their persistence raises the probability that the arguments in which they are employed are unsound.

The supposed contradiction which incompatibilists charge compatibilists with holding is extremely difficult to discover. In the form:

1. x could have not done A
2. x could not have not done A

the contradiction holds. However, when we state the two positions more informally as

3. A person could have done other than what that person did;
4. A person's doing what that person did is the determined result of all history combined with all the natural laws

it seems possible to formulate aspects under which both propositions hold.

The purpose of this paper is not to make yet another attempt to show that these two sentences are contradictory. The purpose is to show that compatibilism entails

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(a) a vicious regress;
(b) the begging of the question of the originating power of animate beings;
(c) the assertion without evidence of the unity of physical nature according to the model of the movement of the sun and the planets.

(a) *Vicious Regress*

The Free Will Thesis: Causality according to the laws of nature is not the only causality needed to account for all events in the world; to understand them and to take purposive action in the face of more than one possible action, for each of which we can possibly be held responsible, we need also to assume a causality through freedom.

The Determinist Thesis: There is no freedom, but everything in the world occurs entirely according to the laws of nature.

The compatibilist holds that the two theses are true, but that one thesis, the second, underlies the other so that each is compatible with the other. If the first thesis were held to underlie the second, the first thesis would contradict the claim of the second to explain everything according to the laws of nature. Only the supposition that the determinist thesis underlies the free-will thesis allows the possibility of compatibilism.

The plausibility of supposing the determinist thesis to underly the free will thesis depends on our recognition that sometimes we can be brought to see that we were moved by unrecognized forces when we thought we were choosing rationally and impartially. "I see now that I was in the grip of blind jealousy or hatred in disallowing that person's just claim." However, we can only recognize such forces if we assume that a better person than we were then could have resisted them, and that we regret that we had not been that better person. (To assume that we could not have become that better person is to beg the question we are discussing. See below.)

The determinist thesis is that in both acting blinded by jealousy and hatred and in coming to see we were blinded we were determined by all history and all the laws. The advocates of determinism who are compatibilists do not simply make one thesis underly the other. They trump the first thesis by the second. They hold that the present set of stated differences between the compatibilists and the free-will incompatibilists was fixed from all eternity. They assert, from their superior knowledge, that that state of affairs was compatible with all that the free-will incompatibilists hold true.

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At the next stage of the argument, the free-will incompatibilists deny this and they and the compatibilists exchange arguments. The compatibilists then appeal to their superior knowledge and pronounce the arguments they had just been engaged in with the free-will incompatibilists as fixed from all eternity. None of the protagonists could have done any other.

The free-will incompatibilists deny this, and the compatibilists enter into argument with them. The compatibilists then appeal to their superior knowledge of underlying causes. And so on, *ad infinitum.*

The argument at each stage is immediately interpreted in a way that rules out any revision of the theory of compatibilism, and no move made by the free-will incompatibilist is able to escape being interpreted by the compatibilist. The refusal to allow the closure of the movement under any circumstances is to espouse a vicious regress.

(b) *Begging the Question*

Compatibilism also begs the question. The laws of nature are assumed to be all there are for explaining everything, even the necessary responsible choice required for carrying on an argument. But that is the question. The free-will incompatibilists assert the power of living beings to choose one of a number of possible courses of action. The believer in the power to choose between more than one possible course of action stands amazed at the assumption that anyone who did believe this would think it possible for them, without superior authority, to change a law. What possible law would the chooser break? Only a chooser can know laws, and any living being that knows laws (even a young sheep dog) is able to exploit those laws.

(c) *Assertion without evidence*

Compatibilists rely on a thesis about the universe that seems to contradict the very activity in which they are involved: the gathering of fresh information, the correcting of past mistakes, and the proposing of theses for rational discussion. Their theory of course admits all these activities at one level, but then goes on to assert that these activities are compatible with and depend wholly on underlying physical processes at the microphysical level. They defend the causal unity of nature.

Yet there is not and can be no evidence that points in the direction of the causal unity of nature. Knowledge of laws is given to animate beings who are free to make mistakes and correct them.

We are familiar with the ability of young sheep dogs to scatter the sheep rather than gather them. We seem to have no problem in attributing originating power to dogs. Astronomers spend their time both

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in gathering more information about the stars, the planets and their moons and in offering different interpretations of the information already in. No one seriously believes that the moon is gathering more information about Jupiter and interpreting what she knows differently from the interpretation offered by Mars. Astronomers and engineers could well work on the problem of how to destroy or deflect a meteorite travelling towards the earth. No one would consider that they should try to train the meteorite to avoid the earth. On the other hand, a shepherd who has an impetuous young sheep dog which tends to scatter the sheep rather than gather them sets about training it to become more useful.

A game of billiards depends on the skill of the two players in striking the balls with their cues so that the balls interact with the table to produce movements that score. The philosophers who assert that the whole game is really like the movements of the billiard balls on a large scale (which includes the two players, the whole history of the universe up to that point, and all the physical laws) offer no evidence in favour of their assertion.

The success of predictions of the eclipse of the moon and the success of engineers in building jet engines and the success of scientists in cloning a sheep are sometimes cited as examples of the causal unity of nature. However, only beings who are free to study nature and to manipulate things that obey known laws have produced these successful outcomes. No computer multiplies; it can do no more than simulate multiplication when set going according to a programme by operators and programmers.

The assertion of the causal unity of nature involves the unity not simply of the nature which animate beings observe and manipulate, but the unity of the natural processes of the observers and manipulators as well.

There is a further irrationality hidden within the activity of asserting a thesis without evidence. Recall the claim. If we knew all of history and all the laws, we would be able to forecast every action of the sheep dog as surely as we predict the eclipses of the moon or the sun. The claim in principle to be able to predict the actions of living beings can in practice never be refuted because any failed prediction can always be attributed to incomplete knowledge of all the laws and of all the history. If there was no beginning to history, then all past history is infinite. There is chance as well as law, which introduces yet another factor. There is no end of problems, to infinity. Another infinite regress, which returns us to the first irrational move.

Conclusion

It is at least dangerous to espouse a theory that entails irrational moves.

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