

3.0 Are we free?

Some Philosophical Tools

- **Necessary conditions:** A is necessary for B if you cannot have B without having also A. Stated in logic, we say A is necessary for B if and only if: (If B is true, then A is true.)
- **Sufficient conditions:** A is sufficient for B if B is true whenever A is true. Stated in logic, we say A is sufficient for B if and only if: (If A is true, then B is true.)

Some notions of free will

Philosophers have not agreed on the best definition of “free will”. Here is a list of possible sufficient conditions. We might say an agent is free in doing an action A if she...

1. Could have done otherwise than A
2. She is the cause of her doing action A
3. She made a conscious choice to do A
4. She wanted to do A

Some notions of free will

Note that some philosophers believe we need to combine some of these criteria. For example, one might claim:

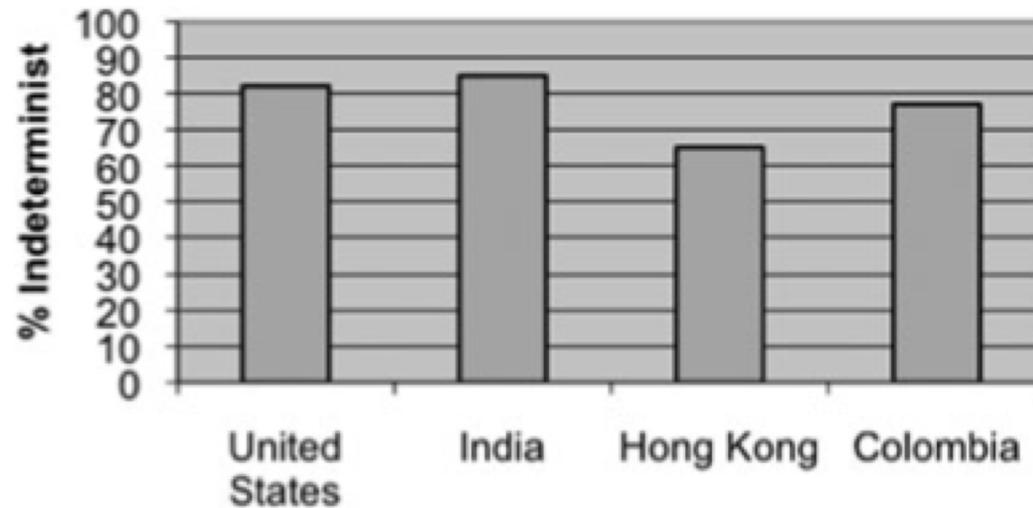
An agent is free in doing an action A if she:

- made a conscious choice to do A, **and**
- her conscious choice is the cause of her doing action A.

Some Philosophical Tools

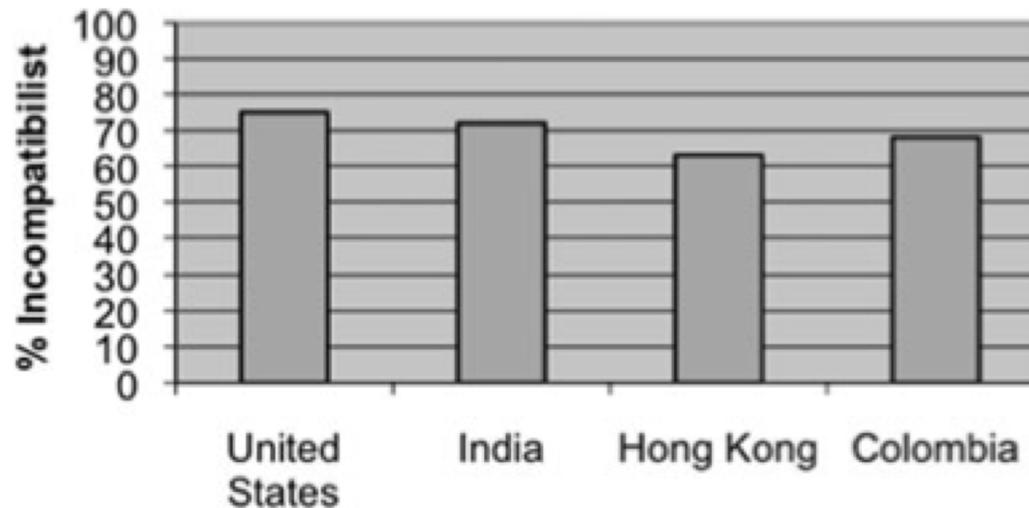
- **Fatalism:** knowing about a future event makes those events necessary. (Often combined with the idea that a god exists and knows what will happen in the future.)
- **Determinism:** past events make each future event necessary.
- **Indeterminism:** the denial of determinism.
- **Compatibilism:** freedom and determinism are (or can be) consistent with each other. (Usually combined with the claim that determinism is true and that we are free.)
- **Incompatibilism:** freedom and determinism are inconsistent with each other.
- **Libertarianism:** incompatibilism is true and we are free.

Most people think we live in an indeterministic universe



Source: **Is Belief in Free Will a Cultural Universal?** HAGOP SARKISSIAN, AMITA CHATTERJEE, FELIPE DE BRIGARD, JOSHUA KNOBE, SHAUN NICHOLS AND SMITA SIRKER. *Mind & Language*, Vol. 25, No. 3 June 2010, pp. 346–358.

Most people think incompatibilism is true



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Three problems

- Fatalism
- Casual determinism
- The idea that conscious free will is an illusion

An example of the fatalist problem

1. Suppose that there is a god that is omniscient and infallible (including about the future).
2. If there is an omniscient and infallible god, then this god knows that you will do *A* tomorrow.
3. But if the omniscient god knows you will do *A* tomorrow, then you will do *A* tomorrow. (Otherwise, the god would not be omniscient and infallible.)
4. But if you will do *A* tomorrow, then you could not have done other than *A*. (If you could have done otherwise, then the god could have been wrong and so could have been fallible.)
5. If you were free when you did *A*, then you could have done otherwise than *A*.
6. (By 1 and 2) the god knows you will do *A* tomorrow.
7. (By 6 and 3) you will do *A* tomorrow.
8. (By 7 and 4) you could not have done other than *A*.
9. (By 5 and 8) you were not free when you did *A*.

Here we used sufficient condition 1: the agent is free if she could have done otherwise. This argument works for any future action!

NOTE: Descartes, in his reply to the Princess, attacks what is here premise 4.

The Causal Problem. Laplace's Demon.

We may regard the present state of the universe as the effect of its past and the cause of its future. An intellect which at a certain moment would know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed, if this intellect were also vast enough to submit these data to analysis, it would embrace in a single formula the movements of the greatest bodies of the universe and those of the tiniest atom; for such an intellect nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes.

—Pierre Simon Laplace, 1951: 4. *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*, translated by F.W. Truscott and F.L. Emory, New York: Dover Publications.

An argument for the causal problem

1. Each event is made necessary by past events.
2. Suppose you do some action *A*.
3. If you do *A*, then past events made it necessary that you do *A*. (Instance of 1)
4. If it was necessary that you do *A*, then you could not have done otherwise.
5. If you were free when you did *A*, then you could have done otherwise than *A*.
6. (By 2 and 3) it was necessary that you do *A*.
7. (By 3 and 6) you could not have done other than *A*.
8. (By 5 and 7) you were not free when you did *A*.

Here we used sufficient condition 1: the agent is free if she could have done otherwise.

What about randomness?

- Modern science allows for random events (many small scale quantum events are random).
- This means that the idea that we are free if we could have done otherwise might be trivially satisfied: if we act randomly, then we might have done one thing, or we might have done another.
- Most philosophers think that's not what we want from the idea of free will. We want that we could have done otherwise **and** if we do otherwise we are the cause of the alternative action because we chose the action.

The Causal Problem, with Randomness.

1. Each event is made necessary by past events, or the event is random.
2. If an event is random, then it was not chosen by you.
3. Suppose you do some action *A*.
4. If you do *A*, then past events made it necessary that you do *A* or *A* is random.
(Instance of 1)
5. **If you were free when you did *A*, then you could have done otherwise than *A* and your actions are chosen by you.**
6. (By 3 and 4) past events made it necessary that you do *A* or *A* is random
7. If past events made it necessary that you do *A*, you could not have done other than *A*.
8. If *A* is random, then your action was not chosen by you. (Instance of 2)
9. (By 6, 7, 8) You could not have done other than *A* or your action was not chosen by you.
10. (By 9) it is not the case that you could have done otherwise than *A* and your actions are chosen by you.
11. (By 5 and 10) you were not free when you did *A*.

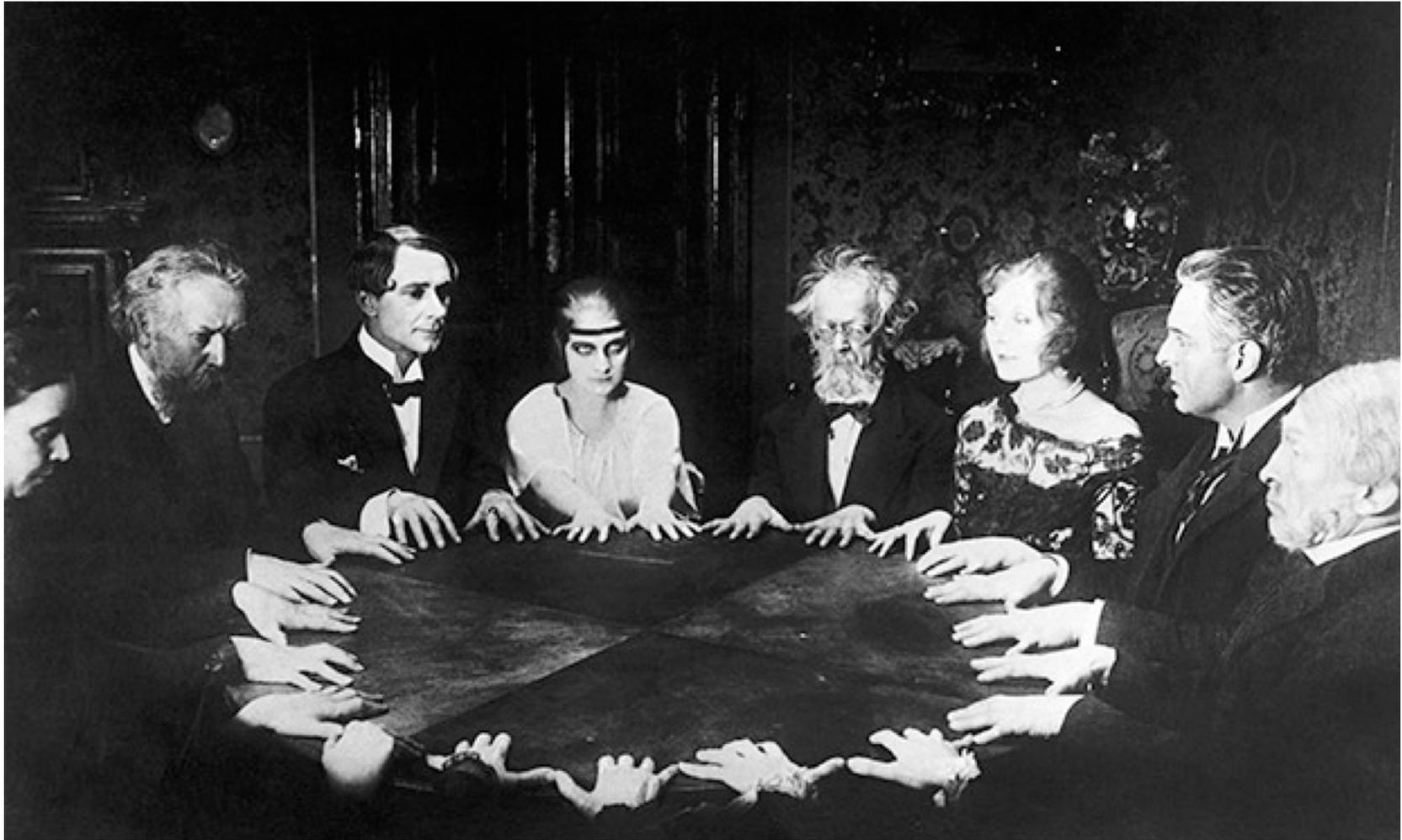
Here we combine sufficient conditions 1, 2 and 3. For 1: the agent is free if she could have done otherwise. Combining sufficient conditions 2 and 3: “her actions are chosen by her” can mean her conscious choice is the cause of her actions.

Clever Hans









Conscious Free Will

We can define an action as a result of “*conscious free will*” if the action is caused by a conscious act of the will (that is, the act is caused by a conscious decision).

This is equivalent to: An agent is free in doing an action A if she

- made a conscious choice to do A, and
- her conscious choice is the cause of her doing action A.

Soon et al paper

- We saw a paper that claimed to show that under certain conditions the scientists could (to a statistically significant degree) predict the actions of a subject in an experiment, before the subject reports they chose to take that action.
- One theory is that the causal path and order is actually like this:
 1. You unconsciously start some action, and then afterwards
 2. Your consciousness becomes aware of the beginning of the action, and then after that
 3. You (wrongly) conclude that this becoming-aware of the initiation of the action is a choosing-to-do-the-action.
- If this is the sequence for many of our actions, then Wegner would be right to say that conscious free will is an illusion (in those cases where the chain of actions is as described above).
- Note: this argument does not undermine sufficient criteria 1 or 2.

Two examples of compatibilism

Hobbes's: as long as someone is not physically impeded in doing *A*, then she did *A* freely.

Hume & Frankfurt: as long as someone does *A* while she wants to do *A*, then she is free when she does *A*.

Two Frankfurt Cases

- The Unfree Heroin Addict: he does not want to spend his money on heroin, but he does spend his money on heroin.
- The Free Heroin Addict: he wants to spend his money on heroin, and he does spend his money on heroin.