A Taxonomy of Free Will Positions

Determinism

Compatibilism
Soft Determinism

Hard Determinism

Soft Compatibilism

Hard Incompatibilism

In

Illusi

Narrow Incompatibilism

Impossibilism

Soft Incompatibilism

Valerian Model

Leeway
(Alterna

Source Incompatibilism
(Actual Sequence)

Two-Stage Model with Limited

This chapter on the web
informationphilosopher.com/freedom/taxonomy.html

Indeterminism

Taxonomy of Free Will Positions

The free will debates of the late 20th century tended to be mono-logues and diatribes defending narrow niche positions against many other possible positions on free will.

This too is part of the scandal in philosophy. Instead of carving out narrow niches and developing specialized new vocabularies of technical terminology, philosophy would be better served by an effort to standardize the jargon used in the dialectic. We may not be able to achieve the universal, ambiguity-free language that Leibniz dreamed of and logical positivists hoped for, but we could try to simplify rather than complicate.

The next best thing is to provide as complete a set of jargon terms as we can assemble (see the Glossary, and the I-Phi website version, which is of course a work in progress).

Of all the terms, the most important are those used to describe what might be loosely called major "schools" on free will. For me, there are three historically significant terms - determinism, libertarianism, and compatibilism. This last is the current name for William James' "soft" determinism, which is the logically con-tradictory notion that free will is compatible with determinism.
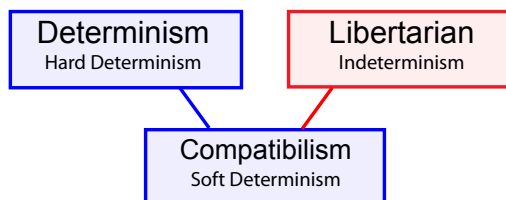

Figure 6-1. Traditional categories of the free will debates.

Compatibilism is an old idea, of course. Immanuel Kant found it in the work of the English thinkers Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, George Berkeley, and especially in David Hume. Kant described it in his 1788 *Critique of Practical Reason*,

"although the actions of men are necessarily determined by causes which precede in time, we yet call then *free*, because these causes are ideas produced by our own faculties..."

"This is a wretched subterfuge ["miserable substitute" is a better translation of *ein elender Behelf*, but the English phrase is now famous in philosophy] with which some persons still let themselves be put off, and so think they have solved, with a petty word-jugglery [again, "a little quibbling" is better for *einer kleinen Wortklauberei*], that difficult problem, at the solution of which centuries have laboured in vain, and which can therefore scarcely be found so completely on the surface." [1]

I agree that it is sophistry to solve the problem of free will and determinism by a language game that redefines freedom.

JOHN STUART MILL took up the notion and it was known as the Hume-Mill tradition of reconciling freedom with determinism.

WILLIAM JAMES thought this idea a "quagmire of evasion," a "eulogistic terminology," and a "mere word-grabbing game played by the soft determinists." He says "they make a pretense of restoring the caged bird to liberty with one hand, while with the other we anxiously tie a string to its leg to make sure it does not get beyond our sight." [2]

Incompatibilism Changes the Taxonomy

"Soft" determinism became "compatibilism" in the early 20th century. It was, and still is, the most popular view of philosophers, although it was challenged when CARL GINET and later PETER VAN INWAGEN argued for "incompatibilism." This incompatibilism was not simply arguing that determinism was not true, but that the presumed compatibilist premise - that free will involved, perhaps required, or even entailed, determinism - was not true.

As we saw in Chapter 3, R. E. HOBART had argued in 1934 that free will involves **determination**, otherwise our willed actions would be random. Ginet and van Inwagen used the first part of the **standard argument** to show that if we are determined, we are not free. Therefore, compatibilism is not true. Q.E.D.?

No. Logical philosophers say that the alternative is incompatibilism. And they note that there are two ways that determinism

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1   Kant (1962) p. 332.
2   James (1956) p. 149.

and free will can be incompatible. The first is the normal libertarian view. Free will is true. Determinism is false.

But there is another possibility. Free will is false and determinism is true. This is James' traditional "hard" determinism. Van Inwagen convinced many philosophers that a compatibilism-incompatibilism dichotomy made more sense than the traditional freedom-determinism dichotomy (with compatibilism their reconciliation). He wrote in 1983:

> "I shall argue that free will is incompatible with determinism. It will be convenient to call this thesis incompatibilism and to call the thesis that free will and determinism are compatible compatibilism.

> "I have no use for the terms 'soft determinism', 'hard determinism; and 'libertarianism'. I do not object to these terms on the ground that they are vague or ill-defined. They can be easily defined by means of the terms we shall use and are thus no worse in that respect than our terms.

> "Soft determinism is the conjunction of determinism and compatibilism; hard determinism is the conjunction of determinism and incompatibilism; libertarianism is the conjunction of incompatibilism and the thesis that we have free will.

> "I object to these terms because they lump together theses that should be discussed and analysed separately. They are therefore worse than useless and ought to be dropped from the working vocabulary of philosophers." [3]

In my view, it is van Inwagen's new terms that are "worse than useless" (though they have been accepted as the standard jargon in the current dialectic). They are useless because they also "lump together theses that should be discussed and analysed separately," namely they call both libertarians and determinists "incompatibilists." What could be more confusing? But van Inwagen's new jargon has succeeded. The old terms are seen less often today in the working vocabulary.

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3   Van Inwagen (1983) p. 13.

If "soft" determinism was a "quagmire of evasion," van Inwagen's "incompatibilism is a deeper and darker "tarpit of confusion."

As Kadri Vihvelin said in her Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article on Incompatibilism,

> "Why an encyclopedia entry on arguments for incompatibilism? (Why not an entry on the problem of free will and determinism?)"[4]

It seems to me embarrassing for libertarians to have to describe themselves as "incompatibilists," especially since incompatibilism "lumps together" libertarians and determinists. Randolph Clarke's SEP article on free will thus has the convoluted and confusing title "Incompatibilist (Nondeterministic) Theories." [5]

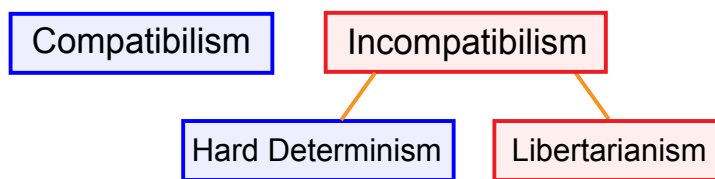The van Inwagen taxonomy then looks like this,

Figure 6-2. Van Inwagen's compatibilism-incompatibilism categories.

The fact that compatibilists are also determinists is obscured in this taxonomy. It helps the compatibilists to co-opt the term "free will" for their "compatibilist free will," in opposition to a supposed unintelligible "libertarian free will."

Free will is not a puzzle to be dis-solved by the logical paradoxes and language games of the philosophers, especially those analytic language philosophers who pride themselves on their clear conceptual analysis.

A New Taxonomy

So I have developed an extended version of the traditional taxonomy of free will positions. Positions are defined by what they are, rather than what they are not. It is based on the traditional (hard) determinism - libertarian (indeterminist) - compatibilism (soft determinist) distinctions that van Inwagen thought "useless."

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4   plato.stanford.edu/entries/incompatibilism-arguments/
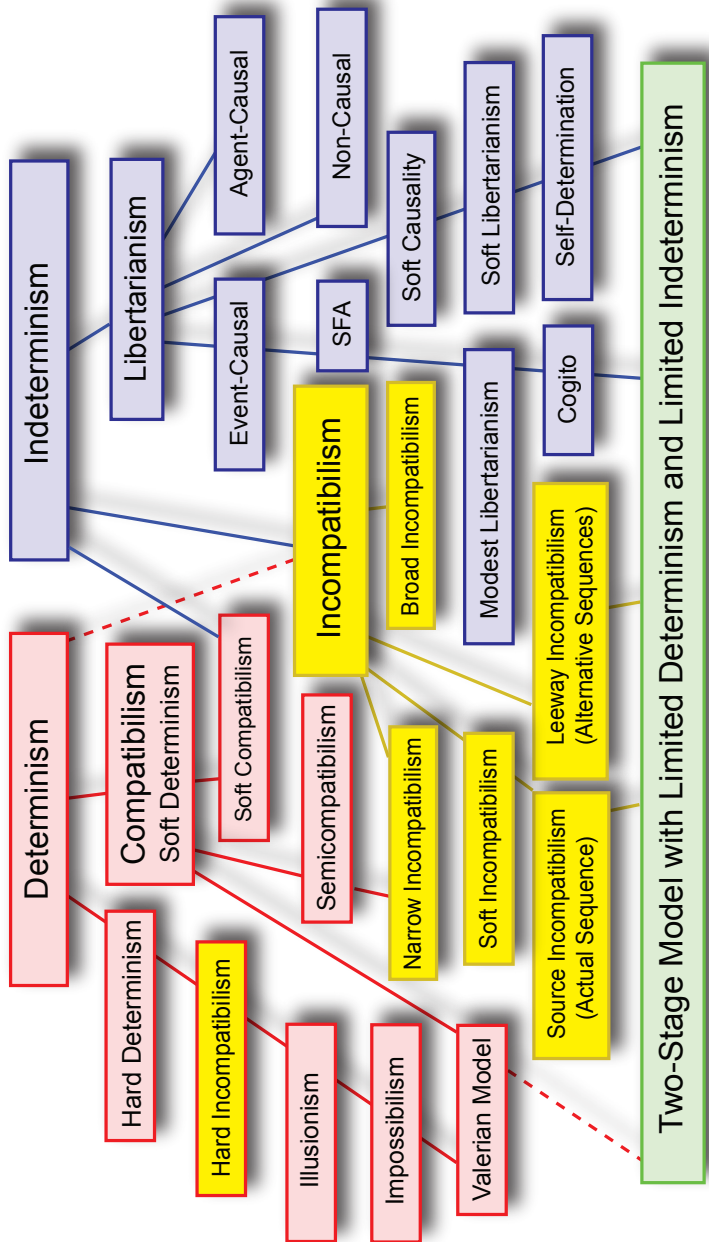5   plato.stanford.edu/entries/incompatibilism-theories/

Figure 6-3. Taxonomy of Free Will Positions

Chapter 6

My new taxonomy calls a determinist a determinist, and arranges other positions in their proper places in the hierarchy.

Libertarian incompatibilists are under indeterminism. Hard determinist incompatibilists are under determinism.

The new hierarchy is open to the criticism that it puts compatibilists at a disadvantage when claiming that their position is "free will," by showing clearly their deterministic position. So be it.

Here are some brief definitions for the positions in Figure 6-2. For still more interrelationships, see the Glossary.

Determinism is the position that every event is caused, in a chain of events with just one possible future. Historically, there are many kinds of determinisms or causes for the one possible future. They are discussed in Chapter 9.

"Hard" determinism and **"soft" determinism** are terms invented by William James who lamented the fact that some determinists were co-opting the term freedom for themselves. [6]

"Hard" determinists deny the existence of free will. **"Soft" determinists** baldly claim their position as "free will."

Compatibilism is the most common name used today for James's category of "soft" determinism. For compatibilists, free will is compatible with determinism, or would be, *if determinism were true*, the agnostics on determinism say.

This makes compatibilism today much more complicated...

We can divide two sub-categories of compatibilism, as we did for incompatibilsm, based on their view of determinism.

Today's sophisticated (and sophistical) compatibilists want to include both "the conjunction of compatibilism and the thesis that determinism is true" AND "the conjunction of compatibilism and the thesis that determinism is false." They want it both ways (or either way), because most compatibilists today are agnostic on the truth of determinism. (Most are cognizant of the indeterminism of quantum physics.)

It is thus difficult today to know what compatibilists are compatible with! We are being sucked deeper and deeper into William James' "quagmire of evasion," to a "tarpit of confusion."

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6   James (1956) p. 149.

Semicompatibilists are agnostic about free will and determinism, but claim that **moral responsibility** is compatible with determinism, in any case. Narrow incompatibilism is a similar concept.

Hard incompatibilists think both free will and moral responsibility are incompatible with determinism, which is "true.".

Illusionists are hard incompatibilists, who say free will is an illusion and usually deny moral responsibility. Some say we should preserve moral responsibility in society by maintaining the illusion (i.e., keep the masses uninformed about the "truth" of determinism).

Impossibilists are also hard incompatibilists. They say moral responsibility is provably impossible.

Incompatibilism is the idea that free will and determinism are incompatible. Incompatibilists today include both hard determinists and libertarians. This confusion, created by analytic language philosophers who are normally committed to clear and unambiguous conceptualization, adds difficulties for new students of philosophy.   See pp. 59-61.

Soft incompatibilists say that free will is incompatible with pre-determinism, and that pre-determinism is not true. It is preferable to the loose usage of the term "incompatibilist" to describe a libertarian, since "incompatibilist" is ambiguous and also used for determinists (hard incompatibilists).

Source and **Leeway** incompatibilists locate indeterminism in the **Actual Sequence** of events or **Alternative Sequences**. An **Actual Sequence** event breaks the causal chain.   **Alternative Sequences** provide alternative possibilities.[7]

Indeterminism is the position that there are random (chance) events in a world with many possible futures.

Libertarians believe that indeterminism makes free will possible. But it is not enough. Many philosophers admit indeterminism may be true, but that it does not provide free will ("hard" indeterminists?). See the **standard argument** against free will in Chapter 4. If our actions are determined, we are not free. If they

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7   See Timpe (2008) for a very clear account.

are random, we are not responsible for them. So indeterminism is not enough. We also need "**adequate determinism**" - Hobart's determination - in a second stage (See Chapter 13).

Agent-causal indeterminists are libertarians who think that agents originate causes for their actions. These causes are not events. So their actions do not depend on any prior causes. Some call this "metaphysical" freedom.

Non-causal indeterminists simply deny any causes whatsoever for libertarian free will.

Event-causal indeterminists generally accept the view that random events (most likely quantum mechanical events) occur in the world. Whether in the physical world, in the biological world (where they are a key driver of genetic mutations), or in the mind, randomness and uncaused events are real. They introduce the possibility of accidents, novelty, and both biological and human creativity.

Soft Causality is the idea that most events are adequately determined by normal causes, but that some events are not precisely predictable from prior events, because there are occasional quantum events that start new causal chains with unpredictable futures. These events are said to be *causa sui*.

Soft Libertarians accept some indeterminism in the Actual Sequence. They are source incompatibilists.

Self-Determination is the traditional name for decisions that are the result of our choices, determined by our character and values, etc., decisions that are "**up to us**."

SFA is the **Self-Forming Action** of Robert Kane's libertarian free-will model, with indeterminism centered in the choice itself.

Two-Stage Models that combine limited **Determinism** and **Indeterminism** have been discussed by many thinkers, including William James, Henri Poincaré, Arthur Holly Compton, Karl Popper, Daniel Dennett (**Valerian Model**), Henry Margenau, Robert Kane, John Martin Fischer, Alfred Mele (**Modest Libertarianism**), Stephen Kosslyn, Bob Doyle

(**Cogito Model**), and MARTIN HEISENBERG. See Chapter 12 and these thinkers' personal pages on the I-PHI website for more details.

Two-stage models include both "**adequate determinism**" (which denies **pre-determinism**) and an **indeterminism** that is limited to generating **alternative possibilities** for action. It is only **pre-determinism** that is incompatible with free will.

> Two-Stage Models in a Nutshell
> Thoughts *come to us* freely. Actions *go from us* willfully.
> First chance, then choice.
> First "free," then "will."

I argue that because two-stage models reconcile free will with both determinism (as DAVID HUME did in his compatibilism) and with indeterminism (as WILLIAM JAMES first did), we can say that this kind of freedom is even more compatible than standard compatibilism, and might be called "**comprehensive compatibilism**."

So why accept "comprehensive compatibilism?" I believe that compatibilists have all along had excellent reasons for insisting on some determinism in any intelligible model for free will. The **adequate determinism** in my Cogito model provides the kind of **determination** R. E. HOBART wanted, for example.

It gives compatibilists the determination of their will by character, values, motives, and desires that they need, but reconciliation with a limited indeterminism also gives them the generation of new ideas that makes them the authors of their lives and co-creators of the universe. See Chapter 28 for more details on the idea of a comprehensive compatibilism.

If widely discussed, the two-stage model might help us to end the "free will scandal in philosophy."

With this taxonomy of free will positions and the **standard argument** against free will in mind, we are now ready to turn to the history of the free will problem.