

Freedom and Determinism

1. Descartes: Indifference and Spontaneity

- That we have free will is an innate or common notion.¹
- Two kinds of freedom: (a) freedom of *indifference*, which is the ability to choose an action among several equally possible actions, or to be able to do otherwise; (b) freedom of *spontaneity*, which is the ability to act from, or in line with, one's will, or to act as one wills (cf. Reading [1]).
- The freedom of spontaneity is compatible with the will being determined or compelled: "the will of a thinking thing is drawn voluntarily [i.e. of its own willing] and freely [i.e. without external force] (for that is the essence of will), but nevertheless inevitably [i.e. driven by an inner necessity], towards a clearly known good".²
- Clear and distinct perception (CDP) compels the will, as it tends towards the truth: but since this is an inner inclination or force, we are spontaneously free. So, freedom of the will is *compatible* with (inner) determination.
- If we *are* determined (by the natural light of reason) to choose what we want, we are 'spontaneously' free. But if we are *not* determined to choose what we want, we are still 'indifferently' free. Hence, the will is 'perfect'.
- Making a judgement involves both the intellect and the will: the *intellect* provides an idea, and then the *will* assents (dissents) to this clear, distinct, obscure or confused perception. Judgements are thus in our power. (And so are errors.)

2. Spinoza: Power

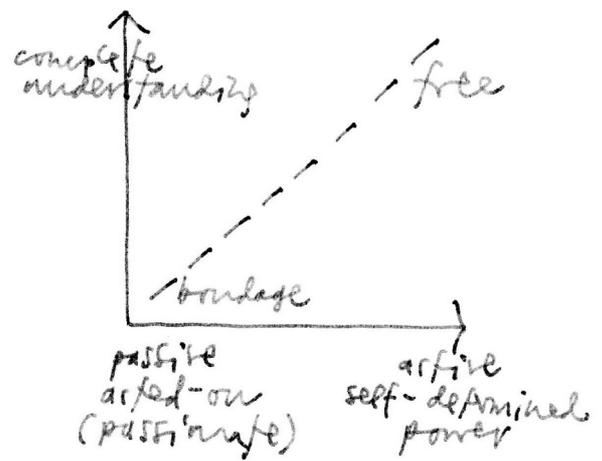
- "That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone. But a thing is called necessary, or rather compelled, which is determined by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner."³
- "A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death. Dem.: A free man, that is, one who lives according to the dictate of reason alone, is not led by fear [...] but desires the good directly, [...], that is, [...] acts, lives, preserves his being from the foundation of seeking his own advantage."⁴ *Conatus*: everything strives to persevere in its being (EIIIP6).
- All our ideas are caused, and hence determined. So, human *freedom* ≠ free will.
- But the more our ideas are determined by our understanding, the more *power* (i.e. virtue, cf. EIVD8) we have or the more we *act*, and hence the more freedom we have. Freedom is self-empowerment. To increase one's power is to increase one's perfection. Moving from lesser to greater perfection is *joy* (cf. EIIIDef.II).

1 *Principles of Philosophy* I §39.

2 *Second Replies* AT VII 166 CSM II 117, see Reading [2] for 17 May 2012.

3 *Ethics* ID7, see Reading [1] for 17 May 2012.

4 *Ethics* IVP67.



- Free agents (a) understand and acknowledge that all events are determined; (b) are dis-passionate (active, reasonable); (c) have ideas that are as *adequate* or complete as possible (cf. Reading [3] for 26.4.2012); (d) reflect on, and change, their ideas and find their true causes; (e) have sound reasons for action (PSR).
Understanding and good (virtuous) use of reason makes agents free.
- Passive or ‘acted-on’ agents are in *servitudo* or bondage. Agents are unfree because they (a) overestimate their power; (b) are driven by passions; (c) think that there are final causes (events caused by ends) or that the world has a purpose.

3. Leibniz: Determined (but not Necessitated) Inclinations

- “[F]reedom[...] consists in *intelligence*, which includes a distinct knowledge of the object of deliberation; in *spontaneity*, in virtue of which we determine ourselves; and in *contingency*, that is, in the exclusion of logical or metaphysical necessity. Intelligence is, as it were, the soul of freedom, and the rest is as its body and base. The free substance determines itself by itself, and this according to the motive of the good perceived by the understanding, which inclines it without necessitating it; and all the conditions of freedom are contained in these few words.”⁵
- Problem: how to reconcile complete notions (monadic programs) with *contingency*? Two strategies. (a) Distinguish between *absolute* and *hypothetical* necessity (cf. Readings [2]–[4]). Absolute necessitates, if denied, yield a contradiction (e.g., deny that a square, i.e. a figure with four sides, has four sides). Hypothetical (consequential) necessities are not contradictory if denied. They depend on, or follow from, God’s choice to create this world: *given* this world with its laws, *x* is necessary. Since God’s choice is the best, this is a ‘happy necessity’.⁶ (b) Distinguish between *finite* and *infinite* analysis. A necessary truth can be analysed in a finite series of steps, or reduced (i.e. traced back) to an identity (e.g., ‘Every human is rational’ reduces to ‘Every rational animal is rational’). It is possible to *demonstrate* that and how predicates are contained in the subject. If this is not possible, since the analysis is infinite, the truth is contingent: it cannot be demonstrated.
- The *principle of the best*: what is more perfect is more likely to exist, and what has more reason is more likely to be true. So, free actions are determined by what the agent deems best, or is in line with their nature (e.g., washing up *if* tidy person). PSR: having sound reasons for doing this rather than that (Reading [2] and [3]). ‘Moral’ necessity: an obligation imposed by reason.
- But even if we have compelling reasons to do *A*, or if it is morally impossible not to do *A*, *not* doing *A* is not a contradiction. So, reasons ‘incline without necessitating’.
- Reasons are not always clear: unconscious (‘petit’) perceptions (cf. Reading [3]).

5 *Theodicy* §288.

6 *Theodicy*, Summary, Answer to Objection VIII.

