

As humans we have the ability to make choices that affect others, because of this we have the free will necessary for moral responsibility. In this paper I will argue that humans have the free will necessary for moral responsibility, and that libertarianism is the best explanation for this. To support my argument I will explore Pereboom's argument that the free will necessary for moral responsibility is incompatible with determinism. After this I will explain the compatibilist and libertarian responses to Pereboom, and defend why I believe libertarianism to be the most compelling position. Finally I will explain what this means for our current moral and legal practices.

As discussed in lecture (B. Knox, personal communication, September 17, 2025), determinism is the idea that actions and consequences are determined far before someone has the opportunity to make a choice, whether by natural or supernatural forces. Pereboom (1995, p. 28) believes that determinism is incompatible with the free will necessary for moral responsibility because someone would have to be able to change their course of actions to be responsible for the morality of their actions. To this point, I agree with Pereboom that determinism and free will are incompatible, but I take the stand that instead of determinism being the deciding force of action that free will is the deciding force of action. Pereboom (pp. 23-26) gives many examples of how Mr. Green is not morally responsible for his actions because he could do nothing to stop the actions from happening. I would argue that these examples are not results of a lack of free will from determinism, but a lack of free will due to the unrealistic situations that Pereboom put Mr. Green in. Case 1, 2, and 3 explore situations where Mr. Green is manipulated by other entities to be a rational egoist and murder Ms. Peacock. Because these manipulators took Mr. Green's agency from him they are morally responsible for the murder of Ms. Peacock.

Pereboom (1995, pp. 24-25) states that a compatibilist would have to show how Mr. Green is morally responsible for the circumstances at some point along the line to have a relevant argument that a person has free will. To this point I would like to explore the jump from case 3 to case 4 in terms of Mr. Green's responsibility. In case 3, Mr. Green was raised in an abnormal environment where he was manipulated to become a rational egoist. In case 4, Mr. Green is raised in the normal circumstances where murder is condemned, but is naturally a rational egoist. In case 4, Mr. Green would understand that murder is wrong as that is the belief passed through normal society, although his rationalization is to give into his desire of murder, he understands that murder is not the ethical option and that he should abstain. There is no outside force that is causing him to choose to kill Ms. Peacock, leaving only intrinsic values and personal choices. A libertarian would argue that Mr. Green's actions are not as a result of random actions, they are all choices that were made at different points in time and while Mr. Green may not always be responsible for his actions, someone is always responsible for the actions.

I favor libertarianism because I believe that people have free will and have the ability to affect the world around them. The idea that your choices have impact but cannot affect the course of events is unintuitive and contradictory. Because of this, I cannot believe the idea of compatibilism. I don't believe that determinism can coexist with free will because in determinism actions are determined before the rational actor is able to make a choice, but with free will the rational actor can make a choice that affects other people, events, and circumstances. Even if an actor believes they can make a choice in compatibilist environments, the belief in determinism would render that "choice" obsolete because the actor would have always had to make that choice and the outcomes would always be the same.

Our moral practices would not change much if libertarianism is correct because the current system is built around the idea that you are morally responsible for the consequences of your actions. This is reflected in the current US legal system. In case 4 of Mr. Green's murder (Pereboom 1995 pp. 25-26), the argument that he was predetermined to kill Ms. Peacock would not be a good case for the defense attorney to make, and Mr. Green would be guilty of killing Ms. Peacock. Beyond the legal system, there is an intuitive action of ascribing blame or guilt to a person because of their actions because it is the common belief that they are capable of doing otherwise or making choices that can prevent certain actions from occurring.

Bibliography

Pereboom, D. (1995). Determinism al Dente, *Noûs*, 29(1), 21-45.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2215725>