

Not the Freedom of the Will: A Conditional Analysis

Pećnjak, Davor

Source / Izvornik: **Prolegomena : Časopis za filozofiju, 2013, 12, 489 - 498**

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:261:524333>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-07-06**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[Repository of the Institute of Philosophy](#)

Not the Freedom of the Will: A Conditional Analysis

DAVOR PEĆNJAK

Institute of Philosophy, Ul. grada Vukovara 54, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia
davor@ifzg.hr

REVIEW ARTICLE / RECEIVED: 20–10–12 ACCEPTED: 14–11–13

ABSTRACT: In his book *Freedom of the Will: A Conditional Analysis*, Ferenc Huoranszki (2011) tries to defend improved and amended version of the conditional analysis of free will. In my critical review, taking chapters 2 and 4 of his book as the most crucial for his theory, I try to show that incompatibilism is still more persuasive and that amended conditional analysis is not compatible with determinism. Despite my criticism, I consider this book as a significant contribution to the free will debate.

KEY WORDS: Compatibilism, conditional analysis, determinism, free will, incompatibilism.

The problem of free will, since Epicurus (Huby 1969), is one of the classical philosophical problems. Ferenc Huoranszki (2011), in his book *Free Will: A Conditional Analysis*, has made really a very significant contribution to this debate. The book is very carefully and scrupulously written with clear, detailed and interesting arguments. Of course, as someone said¹, no two philosophers ever agreed on a single matter, so I would like to challenge some of Huoranszki's claims.

The question is whether agents such as human beings have freedom of the will and freedom of the action. Namely, we can ask whether an agent “could have done otherwise”— meaning that despite the fact that an agent chose to A at time t or did A at time t, he could have done something else instead at time t. In slightly other words, we can ask whether an agent has the ability to chose A or not-A at t or to do A or not-A at t, though, of course, at t he will do one of those things. In still other formulation, we can ask whether it is within agent's power to choose A or not-A or to do A or not-A, at time t.

¹ I really do not remember from whom or where I read or heard this nice sentence.

In his book, Huoranszki aims at defending compatibilism with a developed variant of the so-called conditional analysis of free will. Conditional analysis is originally put forward by Moore (1912), but aim here is not to defend Moore's classical version. Rather, Huoranszki develops his more modern version. Perhaps this is one of the strongest recent attempts to defend compatibilism.

I consider chapter 2 (*Powers and Possibilities*), and chapter 4 (*The Conditional Analysis of Free Will*), as the most crucial ones for establishing the compatibilistic theory of free will, so I shall focus on the claims and arguments put forward in these chapters. If we can put them in question then establishing compatibilism is in serious doubt.

One of the crucial tasks for a defender of compatibilism may be to show that arguments for incompatibilism are, at least, not so convincing and persuasive or that they "do not conclusively prove that determinism and the freedom of the will are incompatible" (Huoranszki 2011: 27). This is the content of the second chapter of the book. In this chapter the consequence argument for the incompatibility of free will and determinism is (re)considered. The most famous version is van Inwagen's (1983) version. He gave three somewhat different arguments for incompatibilism and the first and the third are discussed by Huoranszki. Let's review this discussion. Van Inwagen's (1983: 16) formulation of incompatibilism sounds like this:

If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and the events in the remote past. But it is not up to us what went on before we were born, and neither is it up to us what the laws of nature are. Therefore, the consequences of these things (including our present acts) are not up to us.

The third argument for incompatibilism is a modal argument and goes like this (van Inwagen, 1983: 93–104):

"L" denotes the conjunction of all the natural laws; Abbreviation " P_0 " denotes state of the universe at some moment in the past; "P" stands for any true proposition. " Np " means "p, and no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether p." " \square " stands for "necessarily". " $((P_0 \& L) \rightarrow P)$ " is the abbreviation of the thesis of determinism: the conjunction of statements that completely describe a state of the universe at some particular time in the past and all the laws of nature entail each event and everything that happens after (and before) that particular past time. Beside standard rules of inference, two more rules of inference are used by van Inwagen also:

Rule α : If $\Box p$, then Np .

Rule β^2 : If Np and $N(p \rightarrow q)$, then Nq

Now, the argument proceeds:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1. $\Box((P_0 \& L) \rightarrow P)$ | thesis of determinism |
| 2. $\Box(P_0 \rightarrow (L \rightarrow P))$ | from 1 by the law of exportation |
| 3. $N(P_0 \rightarrow (L \rightarrow P))$ | from 2 by rule α |
| 4. NP_0 | premise |
| 5. $N(L \rightarrow P)$ | from 3, 4, and rule β |
| 6. NL | premise |
| 7. NP | from 5, 6 and rule β . |

Huoranszki thinks that this is a strong argument, but nevertheless, a problematic account: more precisely, it is problematic because the operator N_p or “No choice principle” and rule β , when premises are clarified, “lose all the appeal”. It is true that agents cannot have power over what the laws of nature are and cannot have power over the past events, but Huoranszki claims that there is a significant difference between the past and the future. For the future, it is interesting whether we have a choice about what will happen and whether we can thus influence the outcome of the future (Huoranszki 2011: 17). Huoranszki thinks that the phrase “no one has, or ever had, any choice about” must mean the same in the premises and in the conclusion for the argument to be valid, which is, of course, correct; he also says that this phrase cannot be an interpretation of the aforementioned phrase “not up to us” (Huoranszki: 17). If the phrase “no one has, or ever had, any choice about” means what compatibilists as well as incompatibilists accept, namely that we cannot now act in such a way to influence the past and that we cannot have any influence about what the laws of nature are, then this phrase, says Huoranszki, cannot in obvious way be applied to the present and future and about propositions which say something about present and future actions, and, of course, it has to be applied in that sense. But why not? Huoranszki (2011: 17) says that

[w]e can and often do choose to do something in the future and in this sense have a choice about the truth of propositions that express future events; and often we choose to do something in the present in order to bring about something in the future and in this sense we can have choice about future states of affairs.

² Rule β proved to be controversial but this other controversy will not be discussed here: see McKay and Johnson (1996), Finch and Warfield (1998) and van Inwagen (2002).

Before I discuss this claim on two examples that Huoranszki uses, let's prepare the matters. First of all, I would like to say that determinism is not so abstract as Huoranszki thinks. It can be understood fairly enough. In terms of some state of the universe at time t and laws of nature, determinism means that when all the ingredients of the universe, with their (internal) structures, are at their place at t , according to the basic laws of the universe (which can combine to make laws of higher levels), which apply to them, uniquely specify their position at every other moment in time, whatever these ingredients are (microscopic particles, clusters of clusters of galaxies, mental processes, events). Power of the laws of nature precludes anything but one outcome (for the entire deterministic universe) for each and every ingredient of that universe and for each and every moment of that universe. If this is so, then this power of the laws of nature acting on some state of the universe disables things and agents of doing anything else except what they do at moment t , moreover, at any time t . So, it seems that there can be no ability to do otherwise at t , because it is precluded by the laws of nature.

Huoranszki tries to explain that "up to me" phrase means that "I have intentional control over..." expressing whatever distinguishes our talking and walking from our heart beating or temperature keeping constant (Huoranszki 2011: 13):

I can have intentional control over my walking and talking but I cannot intentionally control my heartbeat or my body temperature. Apply now the consequence argument to this understanding of "up to us". Certainly I do not (cannot) have intentional control over the remote past or over the physical laws of the universe. And if determinism is true, then there is a sense in which my present behavior is the consequence of the remote past and the laws of nature. Does it follow that I do not (cannot) have intentional control over my present actions either?

Obviously, yes. So, exactly the opposite answer seems to me as a correct one than is given by Huoranszki (he says obviously not!) if determinism is true: we do not have intentions in control and we have not intentionality in this sense in control. It only seems (from the very content of intentions and intentional states) that we have control over them and over our decision processes, decisions and actions (though we do not). Intentional states and intentions themselves would be products of laws of nature and previous states and the whole chain of our deciding and choosing would be exactly in every step fully determined if determinism is true. So there is no difference between heartbeat and "intentional" action. Intentional actions are only perhaps more complicated and have a mental feature or subjective feature. But this mentality or subjectivity is also only a product

of the laws of nature and states of the universe in the remote past if the thesis of determinism is true.

So, if determinism is true, intentions are determined (as everything else) by laws of nature and initial states. Intentional control over an action would mean that I have within my power to do A or not-A at time t, despite I do only one of these actions—because no one can do two mutually exclusive actions at the same time—but it is not as such if determinism is true.

Let's get to the examples. Huoranszki uses van Inwagen's own example of a judge who will, by raising his hand, put a veto on death penalty for a certain criminal but the judge does not raise a hand so the criminal is executed. It seems that future for the criminal is dependent on the judge and that he has within his power what will happen to the criminal, but that the criminal does not have that power. But the question is: whether the judge has within his power raising his hand?

It seems that he does not, if determinism is true; and if so, then judge by himself is not a factor which does something about the future with his hand which stayed down, but something else does. If determinism is the case, then judge is in the same position of doing for the future as is a criminal. Let me explain. Dwelling on what is said above, we can say the following.

You don't have a choice about your choosing, moreover, you don't have any choice about each and every step in your "choosing" if determinism is true. It is because mental events and processes are themselves subordinated (as events) to determinism ("choosing" is a mental process) in the way that each and every step of any mental process and event is also just the product of some initial state of the universe and the laws of nature. We only passively introspect these events then (in the first-person mode), but we do not influence them if determinism holds. When actions are outcomes of these processes, they are fully determined as well as each and every mental step in deciding and choosing had been determined (by previous states and the laws of nature) so chain of determination just proceeds (through us); so there is no real choosing between two or more possibilities on equal grounds with a real possibility that one or the other action would be done on the part of the person or agent. Not raising of the judge's hand is in such a way determined in advance that no other real option exists—there is no any option for him to raise his hand in a deterministic universe. So it is not him who influences the future. The future is, as the past, completely and fully fixed because it is set by initial state of the universe and the laws of nature of that universe if it is deterministic. There would be only one unique history or "flow of events" in a deterministic universe.

Next example is about a professional assassin who is asked to kill Bill for a certain amount of money. Assassin rejects the offer because of small amount of money offered. But, also, unknown to the assassin, Bill already died yesterday to natural causes.

Huoranszki (2011: 19) tries to destabilize incompatibilism and determinism with the following:

Did the assassin make a choice about whether or not to kill Bill? It seems obvious that he did exercise his ability to choose. He faced alternatives. He considered seriously what to do. He was mentally sane and uncompelled. He made up his mind. At the end of his deliberation he might have even said 'I have made a choice. I reject the offer. I choose not to kill Bill'. It seems to me rather implausible to claim that whether or not he actually *made* a choice in the sense which entails the exertion of his psychological ability to choose must depend on circumstances totally external to his mental operations. Further, this would imply that, when next day he hears the news that Bill had already been dead, he should say 'Well, so I did not make a choice'. My question is: what then did he exactly do instead of making a choice? I do not think anyone can tell.

I *can* tell. The assassin was under the governance of (physical) laws of nature that governed each and every thought and the outcome of these thoughts on which there was no influence of the assassin; he was just passive observer of what happens in his consciousness as "making a choice" or deliberation, but that choosing or deliberation was already contained (implied) by the state of the universe from a distant past (even in the first initial state of the deterministic universe) plus laws of nature; it only looked or seemed from the inside, from the first person view, as if the assassin independently makes "his own" choice, independently of any other factor. Steps in deciding and choosing what to do were in fact sequences of thoughts that were long ago determined (by some state of the universe and the laws of nature) as, for example, Earth's orbiting around the sun is completely determined long ago and Earth does not do (and, of course, cannot do) anything about it. If determinism is true, then living conscious beings are not different in principle from inanimate object in the sense how they move around and what they do.

So, this is what assassin "does", regardless of whether Bill is dead or alive (and we can, of course, generalize this; so, under the hypothesis of determinism it is what and how anyone "does" something.)

It seems that it follows that the phrase "no one has, or ever had, any choice about" has the same meaning in the premises as in the conclusion. The phrase means that each and every event only depends on initial state and the laws and that nothing else has any influence on what happens and what propositions are true or false. Everything can be explained taking

into account only a full description of some state or initial state of the universe and the laws of that universe—which obtained long before any human being came into existence. So it seems that argument for incompatibilism goes unshattered.

Huoranszki builds his improved and modified version of compatibilistic conditional version of free will analysis, in chapter 4, on Moore's classical version and says that he also follows Locke's spirit in this analysis. First he cites Moore (1912: 220–221):

It is quite certain (1) that we often should have acted differently, if we had chosen to; (2) that similarly we often should have chosen differently, if we had so to chose; and (3) that it was almost always possible that we should have chosen differently, in the sense that no man could know for certain that we should not so choose. All these three things are facts, and all of them quite consistent with the principle of causality.

Huoranszki shows that this classical version is vulnerable to several objections and so this form of conditional free will analysis is inadequate and should be amended. The most serious objection, which Huoranszki accepts, is Lehrer's (1968: 29): "It is logically possible that a man could not have done what he would have done, if he willed to, chose to, tried to, or what not". Lehrer's (1968: 31–32) example is with the implanted device:

It is possible that as a result of my not willing, not choosing, or not undertaking some action, I might lose any of my powers. If we allow ourselves to be somewhat fanciful, it is easy to imagine how this would come about. Suppose that, unknown to myself, a small object has been implanted in my brain, and that when a button is pushed by a demonic being who implanted this object, I became temporarily paralyzed and unable to act. My not choosing to perform an act might cause button to be pushed and thereby render me unable to act.

Huoranszki (2011: 64) comments:

Lehrer shows that even if an agent would do otherwise if he had chosen so, he can nonetheless lose that ability simply by not performing the pertinent action. ... in Lehrer's example, an ability is lost whenever it is not chosen to be exercised. And it is exactly for this reason that the simple conditional analysis breaks down in these cases.

To amend this, Huoranszki says that the definition must be supplemented by the condition which explicitly states that "objects do not change in respect to their relevant abilities in circumstances when these abilities are about to become manifest" (Huoranszki 2011: 64). Conditional analysis must incorporate this condition both about performing an action and making a choice.

According to what is said, the final proposal is the following:

S's will is free in the sense of having the ability to perform an actually unperformed action A at t iff S would have done A, if (1) S had chosen so and (2) had not changed with respect to her ability to perform A at t and (3) had not changed with respect to her ability to make choice about whether or not to perform a at t. (Huoranszki 2011: 66).

Still, as I would like to show, this would not be compatible with determinism because of the very nature of determinism.

Though this amended conditional analysis is, perhaps, resistant, as shown by Huoranszki, to the objections of circularity and infinite regress which jeopardize classical view (Moore's), still this is not compatible with physical determinism. Why? Because, if determinism is true, we change with respect to our abilities to perform something at t and we change with respect to our abilities to make choice about whether or not to perform some action at t. Namely, what we do or choose is, if determinism holds, fully determined at t and only one event, action or choice happens or can happen then. All other things are precluded by the chain of determination which disable you at t to do anything else except what you do. So, we can say the following. Chain of events at t-1 fully and uniquely determines the event at t; let's call this event E. If so, then any other event is physically impossible to happen. Hence, no other ability can be existent at t except ability to realize E. So if determinative chain or sequence prevents you at t to do not-E, then at t you do not have, you do not retain, ability to do not-E. The same we can say for choosing: if determinative chain or sequence prevents you at t to choose not-E, then at t you do not have, you do not retain, ability to choose not-E.

I would like to illustrate this with the example Huoranszki uses himself, but only slightly modified. This modification serves only to reinforce the example and does not alter it in the slightest. When the top high-jump sportsman has broken leg, he does not have an ability to make his standard jump of 235 cm. Likewise when he has serious influenza or so. Factors which made his leg to be broken further make, together with his, now, broken leg, that he can move around in a limited way; or, these factors make that his metabolism functions differently when having influenza from how they function in a normal healthy way; namely, this ill function of the metabolism deprive him of (an ability of) jumping 235 cm. This standard jump of our top high-jumper is thus prevented during the illness. But the same holds for common everyday factors which make things, actions and "choices" happen. Common everyday factors which lead to and determine some action at t prevent all other actions to happen at t, if determinism is true; so agents do not have abilities at t to do otherwise than they do.

Everything else is prevented at t if determinism is the case; abilities are then transient and agents change with respect to their abilities to perform A at t and agents change with respect to their ability to make choice about whether or not to perform A at t.

Let's make things even clearer. When Vitali Klitschko holds you tight and, for example, moves your hand around, you are not strong enough to resist it, however you try: Klitschko makes your hand to move around in circles at time t . You do not have an ability to do something else at t . This is how determination operates if determinism is true. So, at time t , if you are, for example, made by ordinary factors to paint a picture, in a deterministic universe it is the same as it is the case when Klitschko holds you; you do not have an ability to do otherwise or something else instead at t . Since the phrase "at time t " is general and can refer to any time, and since the thesis of determinism is also general, it means that always, when agents do something, they have no ability to do otherwise. The same holds for choosing.

This suggests that even an improved conditional analysis cannot be compatible with determinism and, as such, if determinism would be true, it cannot deliver freedom of the will. So, it seems that incompatibilism is still much more persuasive. Further question—whether hard determinism or libertarianism is true for our universe³ I shall not pursue here—but just say that I would take side of libertarianism.

My interest here has been to defend incompatibilism, so at a risk to be somewhat unfair, I shall not present many virtues which we can find in the rest of the book—I shall only very briefly say a word or two.

In other parts of the book, which I do not have space here to discuss, for example, in the chapters on rationality or intelligibility, Huoranszki gives many insights which are interesting and novel by themselves, even without regarding incompatibilism–compatibilism debate about freedom of the will and action. He also analyses the notion of moral responsibility which is closely related to the free will problem. Of course, according to what I have said, I consider that some of the claims are not compatible with free will, but can be used without much additional effort for other frames of reference in incompatibilism–compatibilism debate or they can be discussed regardless of incompatibilism–compatibilism debate.

Despite my criticism and despite my belief that compatibilism in any version is untenable position regarding free will debate, my recommendation for this terrific book is: you must read it by your own free will!⁴

³ About these matters see for example Balaguer (2010).

⁴ Very personal footnote: The work on this text was partly supported by Croatian people through Ministry of Science, Education and Sport (Contract No. 191–0091328–1091). I would like to add that despite INA–MOL conflict, I consider Hungary and Hungarian people as one of the most friendly to Croatia, and Croatians, including me, like them; and I would like to thank that I had the opportunity to spent two semesters in 1999–2000 at Central European University, Budapest—one of the most beautiful periods of my life. Thanks are due to Ferenc also!

References

- Balaguer, M. 2010. *Free Will as an Open Scientific Problem* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press)
- Finch, A. and T. Warfield, 1998. "The *Mind* Argument and Libertarianism", *Mind* 107, 515–528.
- Huby, P. 1967. "The First Discovery of the Freewill Problem", *Philosophy* 42, 353–362.
- Huoranszki, F. 2011. *Freedom of the Will: A Conditional Analysis* (New York and London: Routledge).
- Kane, R. (ed.). 2002. *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Lehrer, K. 1968. "Cans Without Ifs", *Analysis* 29, 29–32.
- McKay, T. and D. Johnson 1996. "A Reconsideration of an Argument Against Compatibilism", *Philosophical Topics* 24, 113–122.
- Moore, G. 1912. *Ethics*, New York: Holt.
- Van Inwagen, P. 1983. *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Van Inwagen, P. 2002. "Free Will Remains a Mystery", u Kane (2002: 158–177).