

Free Will and Deliberation

Lecture 1: Deliberation-Incompatibilism

Toby C.P. Solomon

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Please stop me if you don't understand a term or definition.

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Most important the kind of deliberation we are interested in is not deliberation about “whether P is true”.

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This later condition is stronger than the simple determinism condition, because which act I will perform at a time might already be determined without global determinism obtaining (perhaps, for example, there is indeterminism in nuclear decay, but it doesn't affect anything I ever do).

The Two Door Problem

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Imagine that you are in a room with two doors and that you believe one of the doors to be unlocked and the other to be locked and impassable, though you have no idea which is which; then attempt to imagine yourself deliberating about which door to leave by.

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Hands up who thinks that you can engage in deliberation about which door to leave by in this case?

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Question: Can you think of any objections to van Inwagen's claim?

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Everyone agrees that rational deliberation is compatible with the actual truth of determinism.

It is generally true that assessments of rationality are relative to an agent's beliefs not the actual facts.

Another Note on Rationality

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Deliberation-incompatibilists generally grant that an inconsistent determinist could engage in deliberation.

But they insist that a consistent (rational) one could not, because deliberation presupposes a belief in the falsity of determinism.

A Quick Diversion: Knowing What You Are Going To Do

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But there are some, such as Clarke (1992), who deny this and claim that we can deliberate even when we know what we are going to do.

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Clarke uses the following example, claiming that Edna can deliberate:

Imagine that Edna is trying to decide where to spend her vacation this year. She mentions this fact to her friend Ed, who, as it happens, is in possession of information that Edna does not yet have. Ed knows that Edna will soon learn that she can, with less expense than she had expected, visit her friend Eddy in Edinburgh. And given what Ed knows about Edna and her other options, he knows that after she learns of this opportunity, she will eventually decide to take it. However, Ed is a playful fellow, and he doesn't tell Edna all of this. He tells her only that he knows that she will eventually learn something that will persuade her to spend her vacation with Eddy in Edinburgh. [Edna] knows, let us suppose, that whenever Ed says anything of this sort, he is right. She believes then, with justification, that she will spend her vacation in Edinburgh.

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Question: Can anyone suggest what might be going wrong with this argument?

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From here on in we will assume that deliberation always involves two or more possible options.

The main question will be what sense of possibility is relevant to decision-making.

The Basic Argument

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Question: Can you think of any objections to this argument?

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Question: Can anyone tell me which premise is the most important?

The Consequence Argument

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Another strategy for arguing in favour of deliberation-incompatibilism is to appeal to the *Consequence Argument*.

The Consequence Argument

If determinism is true, then our acts are the consequences of the laws of nature and 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 (van Inwagen 1983, 16) [emphasis added].

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If determinism is true then “...no human being ever has a choice as to whether or not he shall behave as he does (Ginet 1966, 88).”

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If determinism is true then “...no human being ever has a choice as to whether or not he shall behave as he does (Ginet 1966, 88).”

But surely we cannot deliberate about what we do not have a choice about, or what is not up to us.

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There is a missing premise, can anyone tell me what it is?

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The Consequence Argument

Argument from the consequence argument:

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P2: P1 is knowable *a priori*—no fully rational agent could deny the consequence argument.

P3: One cannot rationally deliberate about what one does not have a choice about.

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Deliberation-Incompatibilism and Newton

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Question: which claim do you think deliberation-incompatibilists should say does not hold in such cases?

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Deliberation-incompatibilists probably don't want to give up 3. But 1 and 2 are easier to reject in such cases.

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However, some combinations may be more *plausible* than others.

How issues about practical deliberation and determinism interact with issues about fatalism is less obvious. It will depend on how we understand the challenge of fatalism.

Summing Up

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The incompatibility is one of irrationality: any determinist deliberator would be necessarily inconsistent.

Next lecture we will consider the response from deliberation-compatibilists who claim that we can account for the intuitions behind the two door case and basic argument without implying deliberation is incompatible with belief in determinism.

Extension: The Consequence Argument

$Np = p$ and no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether p . $\Box p = p$ is necessarily true.

Alpha: From $\Box p$, we may infer Np .

(Vihvelin 2018)

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3. $N(H \supset (L \supset P))$ (From 2 by Alpha)

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3. $N(H \supset (L \supset P))$ (From 2 by Alpha)
4. NH (Premise, fixity of the past)
5. $N(L \supset P)$ (From 3 and 4 plus Beta)

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6. NL (Premise, fixity of the laws)

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5. $N(L \supset P)$ (From 3 and 4 plus Beta)
6. NL (Premise, fixity of the laws)
7. NP (From 5 and 6 plus Beta)

(Vihvelin 2018)

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