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Ferenc Huoranszki's Libertarian Compatibilism

1. INTRODUCTION: HOW I SEE THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF HUORANSZKI'S ARGUMENT

(a) Huoranszki's 'dualism'

Huoranszki (2011) is a dualist in the following sense:

- (a) he is a libertarian within the psychological;
- (b) but thinks that Free Will is neutral on the question of physical determinism.

So he thinks he can combine a psychic libertarianism—giving free will everything we ever really wanted—with a deterministic physics.

The reason for (a) is that choice is a *sui generis* phenomenon that cannot be analysed in terms of the quasi-mechanistic interplay of belief-desire phenomena that psychological determinism requires.

[The belief-desire] picture, it seems to me, misses something fundamentally important about our human agency. Putting beliefs and goal-determining 'desires' with appropriate contents together (no matter how complex those contents and attitudes are) might be sufficient to understand how a goal-directed optimizing machine works, but no responsible human agency will ever emerge from this picture. What's missing is agents' ability to control their actions by their choices. (Huoranszki 2011: 116.)

The reason for (b) is two-fold. (i) The Consequence Argument that purports to demonstrate the incompatibility of free will and determinism does not work (Huoranszki 2011: 12–27). (ii) The conditional analysis, which does work, is compatible with physical determinism (Huoranszki 2011: 54–74). It also accommodates choice in a way that makes the conditionality of freedom different from that of other dispositions, e.g. fragility (Huoranszki 2011: 75–95).

(b) Huoranszki's compatibilism

The overall rationale of the book could be put in the following form

1. The dynamic of psychological discourse is indeterminist but not chancy or random.
2. The dynamic of psychological discourse is autonomous—that is, not tied to the dynamics of physical discourse—even if the physical is deterministic.
3. Psychological discourse can be taken in a fully realist manner.

Therefore

4. There is real free will whether or not the physical realm is deterministic.

Huoranszki argues for 1 in the way mentioned above and in his discussion of the role of reason. And for 2 by his rejection of the Consequence Argument (henceforth 'CA'). 3 is, I think, assumed. I shall try to cast doubt on whether 3 is possible in a world 'closed under physics' later.

My main objective here is to discuss chapter 4 "The conditional analysis of free will", but I cannot do that without saying something about the special nature of choice and how, in my view, the CA should be expressed.

I also want to say something about whether Huoranszki can get away with his dualism.

2. HUORANSZKI'S INTERPRETATION OF MOORE'S CONDITIONAL THEORY

Moore's statement of the conditional theory [quoted-cum-paraphrased] is as follows.

It is, therefore, quite certain (1) that we often *would* have *acted* differently if we had chosen to; (2) that similarly we often would have *chosen* differently, *if* we had so to choose; 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* have so chosen. All these three things are facts, and all of them are quite consistent with the principle of causality. Can anyone undertake to say for certain that none of these three facts and *no* combination of them will justify us in saying we have Free Will? (Moore 1912: 220–221; Huoranszki 2011: 55.)

Huoranszki takes exception to (2) and (3), but I think he misunderstands them both. In relation to (2), he quotes the following passage from Moore.

[T]here is no doubt it is often true that we should have chosen to do a particular thing if we had chosen to make the choice; and that this is a very important sense in which it is often in our power to make a choice. (Moore 1912: 219; Huoranszki 2011: 56.)

In the light of the first part of this quotation, he takes (2) as implying that when we choose, we have chosen to choose (and we might have chosen to choose differently), and he thinks that this leads to a regress. No doubt it does, but this is not the most plausible interpretation of what Moore says. The phrase ‘if we had chosen to make the choice’ is not most plausibly or charitably interpreted as implying a regress where we choose our choices, but as meaning simply ‘if we had chosen to make the *other* choice—that is, if we had chosen differently’. This, I think, is all Moore needs to make the point he wants to make.

On (3), Huoranszki claims that the ability of others to predict our choices is irrelevant to whether they are free—we can often predict what our friends will do. But I think that Moore is making a point common to the compatibilist case, namely that our lack of omniscience is important to our possession of a sense of freedom, both in ourselves and others. If we really could detect all the causes, it would be hard to see actions as free.

Huoranszki challenges Moore’s version of the conditional theory in order to clear the way for his own version of it. If what I say above is correct, Moore’s statement of the theory may be closer to what the conditionalist must say.

3. THE ABILITY TO ACT OTHERWISE: LEHRER’S OBJECTION

Lehrer (1968/1982) argues that there is a case under which it is false that

(i) *S* could have done *A*

Although it is true that

(ii) *S* would have done *A* if he had chosen to do *A*.

This is because (ii) is consistent with

(iii) *S* could have done *A* only if he had chosen to do *A*

And

(iv) It is not the case that *S* chose to do *A*

But (iii) and (iv) entail

- (v) It is not the case that *S* could have done *A*

There is, however, an ambiguity between

- (a) It could have been the case that *S* did *A* only if he chose to do *A*.

And

- (b) *S* would have had the ability to do *A* only if he had chosen to do *A*.

(b) is distinctly strange, because choosing to do something is not usually—and perhaps can hardly be—what endows one with the ability to do it: rather you can effectively choose it only if you have the ability. What we seem to have here is a case of a finkish disposition. Finkish dispositions (the term was invented by C. B. Martin 1994: 2–3) are defined by Huoranszki as follows.

Finkish dispositions have a special feature: either objects lose them in circumstances in which they are about to be actualized, or, inversely, objects acquire them only in the circumstances in which they are about to be actualized, and they disappear otherwise. (Huoranszki 2011: 63.)

An ability that you acquire only when you choose to actualize it is clearly finkish. These are clearly not dispositions of the normal or natural kind. Huoranszki is, therefore, only restoring the natural sense when he provides the following account.

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 to 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 a choice about whether or not to perform *A* at *t*. (Huoranszki 2011: 66.)

It is worth noting that Frankfurt's (1969) classic objection to the 'could have done otherwise' condition on free will is no better than—is more or less a version of—the invocation of finkish dispositions, and just as implausible. The fact that an evil scientist can intervene and prevent you from making a choice you are about to make does not alter the facts about your *natural* capacities, *ceteris paribus*, which is all that disposition and capacity talk, whether of humans or any other kind of object, can consist in.

Compare this to Moore's three conditions. Huoranszki's are just clarifications of the conditionality involved in (1). But being conditional just on choice is, indeed, libertarianism—you would have done otherwise simply if you had chosen to. The compatibilist normally wants to say something about conditions for making a different choice—that is what Moore's (2) does.

There is an important issue in the interpretation of the conditional analysis here. In a sense, conditionality on choice alone is not what the conditional analysis is about. The conditional analysis is really saying that different choices would have come about *under different circumstances*, where *difference of choice alone* does not constitute 'different *circumstances*', in the sense intended. I'm tempted to say that Huoranszki's theory is not really a conditional theory at all. The rationale (according to me) of the book, given in 1–4 above, does not mention conditionals. This does not mean that abilities are not essential to Huoranszki's account, but these abilities are not Mooreanly conditional, for there are not explained in terms of different circumstances producing different choices.

4. THE CONSEQUENCE ARGUMENT

(a) *The two versions*

Huoranszki discusses and claims to refute two versions of CA. The first centres on the supposed transitivity of the operator 'has no choice over'. Its central claim is that if *S* has no choice over the truth of *P*, which expresses the total state of the universe at some time in the past, well before *S* existed, and if *S* has no choice over the truth *L*, which expresses all the laws of nature, then, given determinism, *S* also has no choice over the truth of *A* which states what he is now doing, or will be doing in five minutes.

The problem with this argument is as follows. The compatibilist says that the causal mechanism operates through—among other things—the choices we make, though these themselves are determined. So it will not do to say that *S* has no choice over *A*, because *S*'s choice is one of the (caused and causal) factors that bring about *A*. 'Has no choice over', is not, therefore a transitive relation, as the argument requires. Huoranszki is therefore correct in his dismissal of this argument.

There is, however, the important following reservation, which will become relevant later. If you are a psychological determinist, then the transitivity of the relation does not hold, because choices are amongst the things that determine outcomes. But if you are not a psychological determinist but a physical determinist, where what happens is fixed at a more basic level, then it is not clear that the determining process works *through* choice, rather than rendering it epiphenomenal. We will return to this later.

The second argument is as follows. ' P_0 ' represents the complete state of the universe at some time before S 's birth; ' L ' represents all the laws of nature, and ' Q ' represents some event coincident with a time at which we believe S might act.

- [1] If determinism is true, then the conjunction of P_0 and L entails Q .
- [2] It is not possible that S could have A -ed at t , and Q be true.
- [3] If [2] is true, then if S could have A -ed at t , S could have rendered Q false.
- [4] If S could have rendered Q false, and if the conjunction of P_0 and L entails Q , then S could have rendered the conjunction of P_0 and L false.
- [5] If S could have rendered the conjunction of P_0 and L false, then S could have rendered L false.
- [6] S could not have rendered L false.

Therefore

- [7] If determinism is true, S could not have A -ed at t .

Huoranszki deals with this argument in a way very similar to his treatment of the previous one. He argues that the fact that one does not exercise an ability on a given occasion does not show that one has lost it. This holds true even when there is a deterministic explanation of why one did not exercise it at a given time. (After all, the fact that a fragile glass did not break when it was *not* dropped does not mean it lost its fragility; or, if you want a positive disposition, the fact that the gunpowder did not explode when no-one lit the fuse does not mean it did not possess its explosive capacity throughout.) Huoranszki brings this home by substituting for ' A ' in the argument 'spoke in the last five minutes'. If one did not so speak, it does not mean one lost one's ability to speak in that time, only that one did not exercise it.

This response to the argument as it stands is plausible, but I think that this only shows that the argument should be formulated in a slightly different way.

I think it should go as follows.

- (1) I am not free to do something that I do not have the causal power to do.
- (2) I do not have the causal power to do something the opposite of which is strictly causally necessitated by factors beyond my control.

Therefore

- (3) I am not free to do something the opposite of which is strictly causally necessitated by factors beyond my control. {1,2 Hypothetical syllogism}
- (4) Initial state [P_0] and laws of nature [L] are factors beyond my control.

Therefore

- (5) Anything strictly causally necessitated by P_0 and L is something the opposite of which I am not free to do. {3,4 MP}
- (6) If determinism is true, P_0 and L strictly causally necessitate all my actions.
- (7) Determinism is true.

Therefore

- (8) P_0 and L strictly causally necessitate all my actions.

Therefore

- (9) I am not free to do the opposite of anything that I actually do. {5,8 MP}

The assumptions are 1, 2, 4, 6, 7. No-one disputes 4, 6 follows from definition of determinism and 7 is *ex hypothesi*. So the compatibilist must dispute 1 or 2, and I do not see how.

(b) Van Inwagen and avoiding the appeal to 'cause'

Van Inwagen's version of CA is stated in terms of the entailment of what will happen by the antecedent conditions and the laws; there is no explicit mention of causation, whereas I appeal to causal powers. This is no accident.

Van Inwagen says

The reader will note that the horrible little word 'cause' does not appear in this definition [of determinism]. Causation is a morass in which I for one refuse to set foot. (Van Inwagen 1983: 65.)

This applies not just to this definition, but to the whole statement of the argument.

Huoranszki, more explanatorily, says

For a long while, this question was formulated in terms of causes, more precisely, as the problem of how 'universal causation' is compatible with human freedom. ...

This way of formulating the problem has, however, lost popularity in the last couple of decades because the argument from universal causation relies on two assumptions that many philosophers would reject. First, the argument assumes that the occurrence of the cause must metaphysically necessitate its effect. It is in this sense that universal causation renders events non-contingent. Hume has famous-

ly claimed, however, that we 'can always *conceive* any effect to follow from any cause...' and that 'whatever we conceive is possible, at least in the metaphysical sense' ... Second, the argument presupposes that causation must be deterministic ... (Huoranszki 2011: 12.)

Huoranszki's second worry is irrelevant because we are discussing determinism, and that so the assumption of determinism would beg no questions: but, in fact, there is no assumption about all causation being deterministic in my argument. Nor, as far as I can see, is there anything in it that a Humean about causation (that is, a regularity-cum-counterfactual theorist, like, for example, David Lewis) could object to. Someone might argue that, as the 'powers' conception of causation is anti-Humean, the expression 'causal powers' rules out a Humean interpretation of cause. This is not so. The expression 'possessing a causal power' in context merely means the possibility of exercising (as opposed to merely possessing) at a given time an ability one possesses, however that is interpreted metaphysically.

I do not see that this argument is dependent on any particular (and, hence, controversial) understanding of causation. So I do not see the force of van Inwagen's objection to employing that term.

Van Inwagen tries to avoid objections like Huoranszki's by arguing that we are not disputing abilities in general but the power to do particular things on particular occasions. So it is not the existence of some general dispositional or ability-state that is at stake, but rather the possibility of someone's acting in a certain way at a particular time. This surely captures more accurately than any general ascription of a capacity what we mean when we assert that someone was free to do something at a particular time. This could be built into the argument as follows.

(1') I am not free to do something at t if I do not have the causal power at t to do that thing at t .

So it is not merely a case of having-at- t the relevant capacity, but having the relevant capacity to do-at- t the action in question.

(2') I do not have the causal power at t to do at t something the opposite of which is nomologically necessitated by factors beyond my control.

Therefore

(3') I am not free to do at t something the opposite of which is nomologically necessitated by factors beyond my control.

(4) [As before.]

- (5') Anything nomologically necessitated by P_0 and L is something the opposite of which I am not free to do. {3,4 MP}
- (6') If determinism is true, P_0 and L nomologically necessitate all my actions.
- (7) [As above.]

Therefore

- (8') P_0 and L nomologically necessitate all my actions.

Therefore

- (9) [As above.]

The only way of resisting this argument is to insist that to be 'free to A at t ' is no more than having, at t , the general capacity for A -ing, in the same way as a glass is fragile at t because if someone had dropped it, it would have broken. I think it is clear that this does not capture the idea of free *choice*, as I shall argue in the next section.

(c) Competition between causes, part (i)

The question of to what extent causal lines, or types of causation, might conflict, and how, has been a perennial issue.

Moore's account of the issue (quoted by Lehrer 1966: 189) is as follows.

All that is certain about the matter is: (1) that, if we have Free Will, it must be true, in *some* sense, that we sometimes *could* have done what we did not do; (2) that, if everything is caused, it must be true in *some* sense, that we *never could* have done, what we did not do. What is very *uncertain*, and what certainly needs to be investigated, is whether these two meanings of the word 'could' are the same. (Moore 1912: 131.)

Lehrer adds

The really crucial question to be answered here is the following: Is it logically consistent to say both that a person could have done otherwise, in the sense of "could" related to free will, *and* that he could not have done otherwise, in the sense of "could" related to causation? The reason why this question is crucial is that if the answer to the question is negative, then free will and determinism are logically inconsistent, even if the two senses of "could" mentioned above are quite different. (Lehrer 1966: 190.)

The purpose of the conditional analysis is to give the 'non-causal', 'freedom-related' sense of 'could'. This might be thought of as replacing (1) in my argument with

(1'') I *am* free to do something that I do not have the causal power to do, provided that I could have done it in the conditional sense, i. e., I would have done it, if I had chosen to.

This suggests that Moore and the conditional analysis accept my version of the argument, meaning by that it accepts that *if* one employs the causal-related sense of 'could' (rather than the 'would have done otherwise in certain different circumstances' sense) in one's definition of freedom, then freedom and determinism are inconsistent with each other. My version of the argument might seem, therefore, to be simply question-begging, because it employs the wrong sense of 'could'—the causal, not the conditional one. But what is the 'freedom' sense of 'could'? Simply to invoke the conditional 'would have if...' sense is just too weak. The window would have behaved differently—it would not have shattered—if it had not been hit by the stone, but that does not make it a free agent, so conditionality alone is not enough. Of course, the difference in the case of the window does not run through a causal line involving a choice, but, if determinism is true, it is not the choice that makes the difference—it merely executes the mandate of nature which is antecedently determined—a nature which could never in fact have been different. (If you want to allow for quantum indeterminacy you could add '—except by random indeterminacy, never by deliberate choice'.) It seems to me that Huoranszki wants conditionality *upon choice alone*, but that presupposes that choice itself is not determined, for if it is determined then the action is not conditional on the choice alone but is equally conditional on the factors that determine the choice. Maybe Moore, too, in claiming that there are two different senses of 'could', is also trying to privilege choice as a determining factor in a way that is actually inconsistent with determinism. You could, of course, argue that there is a 'freedom' sense of 'could', just in the sense that some, and only some, determined processes and counterfactuals run through choices; but then you could equally well claim that there is a 'weather' sense of 'could' on the grounds that some processes and counterfactuals run through weather events ('if the rain had not stopped, the match would have been cancelled'). The point is that these distinctions are not between *causal* and *some other non-causal* senses of 'could', but only between the different elements that might be contained in straightforwardly causal processes.

So what the Conditional Argument shows is that the only sense of freedom open to the compatibilist in this area is 'if the world had been different in some of its initial conditions (including mid-process random events) or laws so as to affect my choices, then I would have done something different'. But this seems

a very attenuated sense of freedom, because ‘if things had been originally different, different things would consequently have occurred’ applies equally to events that have nothing to do with choice or freedom, as it does to choices.

5. AN ARGUMENT FOR LIBERTARIANISM (MEETING HUORANSZKI HALF WAY!)

(a) *The argument*

Fred gets up on Saturday morning. He decides to go shopping. On the one hand, this decision is not a random or chance event because

- (i) he usually goes shopping on Saturday morning;
- (ii) he realizes he needs some milk, is running out of coffee and fancies some fresh fish for dinner.

But it is not determined because

- (iii) though he usually goes shopping on Saturday, this is a habit, not an addiction—if he decides he really needs nothing, he stays in and reads a book, with some relief.
- (iv) There is no acceptable way of turning this behaviour into a deterministic scenario, for the following reasons
 - (a) There are no deterministic laws relating usually shopping, needing milk and coffee, wanting fish and going shopping. There are only loose generalizations.
 - (b) The situation cannot be turned into a deterministic one by adding further psychological-cum-conditioning circumstances. E.g. if your mother held you *this* way...and you usually shopped on Saturdays and wanted milk... then...
 - (c) It cannot be turned into something deterministic by *supplementation from a lower level*. E.g. factors as above **plus** being in neural states $N1...Nn$.

Why not? Because this sort of supplementation only works under the following conditions: an explanation at level $L1$ can be made deterministic by supplementation from factors at level $L2$ only if there is a deterministic explanation available in terms of $L2$ alone—in the classic case, when the world is ‘closed under physics’, that is, when all micro entities follow the same basic physical laws, whether or not they are part of some complex entity: when there are, that is, no truly *emergent* laws. So the determinism does not come from the psychological *supplemented by* the physical, but from the physical alone. So one cannot have indeterministic or libertarian psychological explanations that are integrated into an overall deterministic scheme. By ‘integrated’ I mean being an essential part

of the process that is deterministic: so if the deterministic explanation need employ only sub-psychological concepts, the psychological is not 'integrated into' it.

This raises the question of what the relation is between an indeterminist psychology and the possibly mechanistic physical reality in which it is realized.

(b) Competition between causes, part (ii)

Does this not show that physical determinism (but not psychological determinism) and libertarian freedom are compatible?

I have just claimed, in line with Huoranszki, that psychological explanations have a libertarian logic—they are essentially non-deterministic, but not by the adding of a merely random element. But if the world is closed under physics, then exactly where my body is, what motions it is going through and what noises, if any, it is emitting, will be entirely determined by micro-events that are entirely sub-psychological. It seems to me that a notion of freedom or agency that allows that it has no role in determining one's bodily location, movements, speech sounds, etc. can hardly be called a form of libertarianism. So what should we say about the psychological discourse that has this libertarian logic? There are two options, either attack or retreat.

To attack is to deny closure under physics for the behaviour of human bodies. This, in effect, commits one to some form of dualist interactionism, which fashion demands that one should avoid.

Retreat consists in admitting that the non-deterministic nature of psychological discourse does not reflect anything non-deterministic about the conduct of our bodies and that, therefore, it does not reflect the nature of any actual dynamic process. It is rather like Dennett's *intentional stance*: it is just a certain way of describing, for certain practical purposes, processes the outcome of which is decided on a wholly sub-personal level. If this is correct, then a realist libertarianism is inconsistent with physical closure. I have argued elsewhere that this Dennettian approach is self-refuting: it makes human psychology a matter of interpretation whilst denying that there are any real interpreters (Robinson 2010). But that takes us on to different issues. The relevant message is that one cannot reconcile a real libertarianism with compatibilism, as Huoranszki claims to do.¹

¹ I am grateful for the comments of participants in the discussion at the conference on Huo's book, and for those of an anonymous reader, which greatly improved (I hope) a hurried initial draft.

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