

## Pepperdine University Pepperdine Digital Commons

---

All Undergraduate Student Research

Undergraduate Student Research

---

4-2015

# A Necessity of Morals

Austin McElrath  
*Pepperdine University*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/sturesearch>



Part of the [Metaphysics Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

McElrath, Austin, "A Necessity of Morals" (2015). Pepperdine University, *All Undergraduate Student Research*. Paper 94.  
<http://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/sturesearch/94>

This Senior Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Undergraduate Student Research at Pepperdine Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Undergraduate Student Research by an authorized administrator of Pepperdine Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [Kevin.Miller3@pepperdine.edu](mailto:Kevin.Miller3@pepperdine.edu).

“A Necessity of Morals”

Austin McElrath

Senior Philosophy Seminar

The Metaphysics of Free Will

Pepperdine University

Malibu, California

April 27, 2015

Word Count: 5008

# A Necessity of Morals

## Introduction

In his address to the senior philosophy seminar at Pepperdine University on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Dr. John Martin Fischer told the students that his initial motivation for his work *The Metaphysics of Free Will* was “to defend moral culpability from the threats of causal determinism and divine omniscience” while also asserting semi-compatibilism. Taking that a step further, the goal for my own work is to defend our need for moral culpability from a metaphysical standpoint. In this essay I will argue that ultimately there are only two possibilities when it comes to a moral-metaphysical framework, only one of which involves human culpability: either human existence has intrinsic meaning and worth, therefore giving weight to our moral decision making and warranting our own culpability when making moral judgments, or that there is ultimately no objective value to human existence, thereby neutralizing any supposed moral implications attached to our actions.

Western Civilization has arrived at a point where it is now a commonly held belief that morality is relative to the culture that employs it and that there are no universally set ethical principles that people should be compelled to follow. This vague, harmless, and socially appeasing view goes by many names: Postmodernism, relativism, binkyism<sup>1</sup> (credit to Mason Marshall, this one is my personal favorite), the list goes on.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mason Marshall. Handout, “Binkyism” Modern Philosophy Course. Pepperdine University, Spring 2015:

“Binkyism is the view that there are certain beliefs which for the following reasons are not worth evaluating. 1. Their truth or falsity is relative to persons or cultures 2. They haven’t been shown to be true 3. They can’t be shown to be true 4. They can’t be true or false. Binkyism is a response to a pervasive problem. Nowadays public debate on political, ethical, and religious issues has a shrill tone: Bill O’Reilly, John Stewart, Bill Maher, and everyone else talk as if people who disagree with them

While such a claim may seem appealing in that it is inherently inclusive of outside cultures and beliefs within any given social framework, most especially a “pluralistic society” like the modern western world it also carries the (allegedly<sup>2</sup>) unintended consequence of robbing morality of its value in the form of human culpability.

My first task is to track the status of said culpability through the different metaphysical theories contained under the umbrella of the free will problem. From there I can begin to devise what meta-ethical frameworks best fit with what I know about free will. Throughout this essay I will be drawing heavily from the works of the philosopher Robert Kane, namely *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* and *Ethics and the Quest for Good*.

### **Argument A: Establishing a Need for a Metaphysical Framework**

While naysayers may cry out in protest that this “unintended consequence” is harmless, I remain thoroughly unconvinced. Any notion that human beings when left alone will naturally gravitate towards performing selfless acts in the name of goodness rather than succumbing to their biologically preprogrammed (and evolution tested), survival ensuring selfish tendencies remains in my view an utter fantasy. This is what necessitates law and order, whether it be physically enforced by the state or metaphysically imposed by a higher power.

Still, dissenters may cry out that it is not the purpose of the law to legislate and enforce morality—I both agree and disagree with that statement. Morality informs the law, and the law is designed to preserve the liberty of the citizens who follow it while

---

aren't just mistaken but are also either stupid or perverse. Binkyism is supposed to combat the problem by making us less sure of ourselves: the hope is, if we're less confident that we are correct, we'll all be gentler with one another.”

<sup>2</sup> Binkyism

guarding their freedoms and their lives from those who would harm or infringe on either.

To quote Kane:

“Debates about free will lead to issues about crime and punishment, blameworthiness and responsibility, coercion and control, mind and body, necessity and possibility, time and chance, right and wrong... it touches ethics, social and political philosophy, philosophy of mind, metaphysics, theory of knowledge, philosophy of law, philosophy of science, and philosophy of religion.”<sup>3</sup>

As one can see, the Stakes are high. As I will show in the following pages, the same “freedom” that these western societies pride themselves on cultivating loses value alarmingly quickly when agents in said society are no longer held accountable for their actions. In short, moral culpability is the thing that gives our freedom value.

Some people reading this might already be objecting on the grounds that most of what I am referring to are surface freedoms—namely, mundane choices we make every day, consciously and unconsciously. What possible moral implications could the brand of milk I choose to buy have? Again, I believe Kane says it best when he makes the distinction between surface freedom and freedom of will. The former amounts to making the decisions described above while the latter amounts to agents being able to do the things we want (and the freedom to have done otherwise should we have wished it) free of any constraints, physical, psychological, or otherwise.<sup>4</sup> What happens though if the distinction isn’t between which brand of milk to buy? Without some constraints to inform our actions, be it legal, moral, or physical, what would stop an agent from choosing to go

---

<sup>3</sup> Kane, Robert (I). *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*. Page 2. Oxford University Press. 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Kane (I), Page 14

buy milk or go shoot the people next door instead?<sup>5</sup>(Unless you are Ted Bundy, in which case you are on your own)

Science, religion, philosophy and psychology all present differing viewpoints as to what governs the actions of moral agents. (This list is short for the sake of brevity and in no way is meant to be comprehensive or binding) Physicists may say that all of our actions are determined by the vibrations and movement patterns of particles at the atomic level while psychologists may assert that free will is simply a grand self-deception society engages in out of fear of being controlled (both of these theories representing determinism). Religious authorities, be them teachers or holy texts may assert a vast multitude of possibilities. Most religions serve the important social function of teaching people the right way to act in accordance with the rules of a given society (a crude definition for ethics), the metaphysical implications being either that these behaviors being promoted are either the expressed will of a divine power or that all actions and events involving the physical world and agents in it are simply actors in a cosmic opera that has been playing out since the beginning of the universe.

Philosophy offers us innumerable ways to address the way humanity should exercise freedom. The study of ethics informs us what actions are right and wrong while asking questions about our freedom to make right or wrong decisions entails a multitude

---

<sup>5</sup> Ted Bundy was a serial murderer and rapist who was found guilty of killing 30 different women in seven states over a four year period. After multiple intense vetting processes by a number of criminologists and psychiatrists, he was found to be completely sane and claimed full responsibility for his actions after being convicted, much to the surprise of the general public. When asked about his motivations for his horrendous crimes, he had this to say "I'm the most cold-hearted son-of-a-bitch you'll ever meet" and "I'm not going to kid you. I deserve certainly the most extreme punishment society has...I think society deserves to be protected from me and others like me" (1989 interview with James Dobson) The important thing for my purposes here is that Bundy seemed acutely aware of the evil of what he had done, albeit without the emotional reaction of empathy. He self-reported that his desire began with addiction to pornography which eventually grew into a fetish for violence against women. Ted Bundy was executed in Pensacola, Florida by the electric chair in 1989.

of facets worth considering. Let us return to the potential positions posited above through physics and psychology. The belief that all actions taken by agents are preordained by either our biological make up or the vibrations of the universe is known as determinism.

Determinism becomes problematic for culpability in two key ways. The first issue is that if determinism is true, then people are not truly free in any sense as the supposed choices made by agents have been predestined for them. This inference leads directly into the second problem which is if agents are not actually making decisions themselves due to unseen forces beyond the control then said agents cannot be held responsible for their actions (Here I am presupposing that the ability to do otherwise is a necessary and sufficient condition for free will and thus moral culpability).

Whether or not one endorses determinism or not, one can easily see the problems this creates for us not only as agents but also as a supposedly well-functioning and just society. How can we rightly convict and imprison a fellow agent if they did not truly elect to do whatever wrong thing it was that landed them in court in the first place? People who endorse this view may counter that punitive action like incarceration or execution at that point would be for the benefit of the society itself by removing a threatening agent from the general population, but this view almost entirely negates any potentially redemptive aspects of justice.

The second major issue with determinism is culpability. How can an agent be responsible in any moral sense if the agent was not free to choose the actions in question? Throughout my study of this issue, I have yet to find any account by a determinist reconciling culpability with this theory. Taking this into account, for the rest of my essay

I will be ruling out determinism as a potential backdrop for my moral-metaphysical framework.

The next theory of free will I wish to discuss is compatibilism, which holds that there really is no conflict between free will and determinism after all and that any supposed conflicts between these two schools of thought boil down to misunderstandings of both concepts. Compatibilists maintain that freedom means that as an agent one has the power or ability to take a given action free of any constraints that may befall them, be it physical, coercive, or compulsive. The key difference here lies in one's ability to do otherwise—one could have done otherwise had the agent wanted to, however since in the physical sense such alternative possibilities remain hypothetical, adherents to this view believe that this situation can still fall into the determinist camp<sup>6</sup>. Upon examination it becomes easy to see how this view of the world became very popular amongst the enlightenment crowd (Hobbes, Locke, Hume and company) as a way of seemingly maintaining human culpability through freedom but also attempting to account for their ever-shifting world view as new developments in the sciences seemingly explained away the mysteries of existence and human endeavor. As convinced as these great men of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were, I am still skeptical. It seems to me that while in the hypothetical sense our potential actions that we could have taken do not carry any weight morally or metaphysically, if there is only one road that we could have taken for whatever reason, be it atomic vibrations or predestination, then we were not truly free to make the other potential choices and that our culpability is merely an illusion.

---

<sup>6</sup> Kane (I), Page 13



Compatibilists may respond that the important thing here is not to confuse causation and constraint, meaning that while we must realize that our current decisions are immediately informed and affected by our previous ones—cause and effect, I am sitting here writing this essay instead of walking to the beach because I have made prior decisions to procrastinate—I am not actually constrained to sit in this chair. I am perfectly capable of not finishing this assignment, failing the senior capstone class and subsequently not graduating from college. (Not) My response to this criticism lies in the opposing philosophical camp, Incompatibilism. The philosopher Peter van Inwagen is perhaps the most prominent incompatibilist thinker working today and to counter the above inference that our decisions are caused by the past he asserts the Consequence argument. If determinism is true in any sense, then all of our actions are the consequences of either the laws of nature or past events. We lack the power or ability to affect the past or the laws of the physical universe, therefore the consequences of these things, including our own actions, are ultimately not up to us.<sup>7</sup> For those thinkers looking to assert our culpability, Incompatibilism looks quite promising.

I will consider the next theory, Libertarianism. Libertarianism in the context of free will refers to the belief that agents have metaphysical freedom—that human agency is not constrained by any outside forces such as atomic vibrations, neural wiring, or divine predestination.<sup>8</sup> For those looking to assert and defend culpability as I am, one would be hard pressed to find a theory that fits this need better than libertarianism.

That is not to say that Libertarianism lacks its fair share of critics. Dissenters argue that if human existence were truly not bound by any of the potential parameters in

---

<sup>7</sup> Kane (I), Page 23

<sup>8</sup> Kane (I), page 32

question, be it the laws of the physical universe, our brain chemistry, or intervention from a divine force, then the only thing left is chaos. The randomness that pervades throughout human existence would act as a parameter to freedom in and of itself; Kane uses an example of a man whose arm suddenly twitches while he is cutting a piece of fine linen, causing him to ruin it.<sup>9</sup> It would seem that such an event would be a hindrance to the man's will, impeding him from freely achieving his purpose.

While I agree that randomness would in this case become a hindrance to the man cutting linen, the important aspect for my purposes is the effect said parameter would have on the man's agency. When it comes to uninterrupted decision making, randomness may even heavily influence the choice of a given agent while necessitating nothing about that particular decision. Kane uses the example of a man deciding between Colorado and Hawaii for his vacation—though he enjoys skiing and has many friends in Colorado, the man is free to choose to go surfing in Hawaii instead.<sup>10</sup> With this in mind I wholeheartedly believe this theory is the right backdrop when it comes to grounding my defense of human culpability.

### **Argument B: Identifying what that Metaphysical Framework Entails**

“The starting points of our enquiry are two of the conditions for modernity—namely, pluralism and uncertainty—which have played a pivotal role in raising doubts about the possibility of objective values and ethical standards in the minds of ordinary persons and in the human sciences and philosophy.”<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Kane (I), Page 35

<sup>10</sup> Kane (I), Page 36

<sup>11</sup> Robert Kane (II). *Ethics and the Quest for Good*. Page 8. Cambridge University Press. 2010. E Book

Up until this point I have examined the metaphysical theories that dominate the free will problem. My next concern primarily deals with another aspect of metaphysics: Meta-ethics. Like Metaphysics, Meta-ethics is the branch of analytical philosophy that deals with the foundations of the nature of right and wrong—how it is we can know what is moral and immoral—as opposed to normative ethics which is concerned with the actions taken by the agent individually. In ancient times these two disciplines would have been undertaken together—Plato and Aristotle both believed that searching for that which is the source of goodness was just as relevant to philosophy as doing those things they judged to be right. The modern day separation of normative and meta-ethics is a product of the same postmodernist mindset that right and wrong only apply in the context of one’s obligations towards another and that good and evil do not matter in and of themselves. On this point Kane has this to say:

“A number of philosophers, including Bernard Williams, have noted that the tendency in modern times to think of morality in this narrow way—as a matter of obligations or duties we have towards ourselves and others; and they have contrasted this view with that of the ancient philosophers who meant by the study of ethics an inquiry into the nature of the good and the good life generally”.<sup>12</sup> I will have more to say on this in a little while.

Meta-ethical theories about the nature of right and wrong typically divide into three main camps. The first camp is moral absolutism, which is the idea that right and wrong exist and remain unchanging in a metaphysical sense as they relate to human action. The second major theory is moral relativism which proposes that the ethical value

---

<sup>12</sup> Kane (II) Page 61.

of a given action is dependent upon situational factors and to a great extent are contingent upon the agent performing the action and the social context the action took place in. Finally, moral nihilism is the idea that there is no need for, nor is there even a way to measure, moral good and evil. I will consider each of these in depth now.

## **Moral Nihilism**

Moral Nihilism, or simply Nihilism as it is more popularly known, is the theory that life and physical existence lack any objective meaning and that any and all supposed moral frameworks do not exist in an objective sense. The consequence of this view is that no moral decisions can be prescribed a value as being more preferable than another and that right and wrong are simply abstract cultural constructs humanity adheres to for social stability.

Popularized by Fredrich Nietzsche in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Nihilism is unique in that rather than promoting a certain normative ethical construct for its adherents to ascribe to, it rejects granting value in any moral sense and instead asserts two potential viewpoints regarding morality. The first ethical theory (if you can call it that) endorsed by nihilism is error theory, which states that no matter how hard people try to assert any sort of objective moral framework fall short of truly prescribing value to moral judgments. The second theory found within the nihilist worldview is expressivism, which holds that any and all value attributed to moral judgments are false because they are simply the opinion of the agent in question. (See the “Binkyism” footnote on page 3)

On an interesting note, meta-ethical nihilism (if there is such thing) becomes a problem in that it is a self-refuting argument to say as a meta-ethical law meta-ethical

truths do not exist in any sense. In short, Nihilism is a dud when it comes to trying to establish metaphysical free will, however it may not rule out physical free will as the randomly generated universe may still be developing—in that instance, one would have to discern if the expanding and contracting movements of the cosmos had any sort of physical impact on human agency. (But that’s another essay, for another time.)

### **Moral Relativism**

Moral Relativism is the meta-ethical theory that the moral value of a given action is contingent upon the cultural context in which said action is taking place. In this view, right and wrong differ according to the people group being judged. This worldview is the absolute epitome of the postmodern thought I have set out to debunk.

Three main normative theories arise from the meta-ethical construct of moral relativism. The first one bears the same name as its parent worldview. Moral relativism from a normative standpoint refers to the theory that morality is entirely contingent on the society practicing it and specifically that all prescriptive claims made by a practitioner of the theory only stand up to scrutiny when they are made within the context of that respective agents culture.

The second normative theory that arises from meta-ethical relativism is consequentialism or utilitarianism. While it may seem slightly odd to see this theory nestled up to normative relativism, it is important to see that they necessarily derive from the same meta-ethical worldview. Utilitarianism, while asserting that there is a right and wrong course of action for an agent to take, shifts the moral value of each possible action based on the context in which it is being performed. Largely the brainchild of the great 19<sup>th</sup> century English philosopher and politician John Stuart Mill, consequentialism holds

that the end goal of morality is the maximization of pleasure and happiness for the largest segment of people possible while simultaneously minimizing the pain and suffering of the corresponding group. Mill's primary motivation when promoting utilitarianism was the benefit of the public--- as a member of parliament he was often exposed to and consequently sympathetic to the needs and desires of Britain's working class.

The way I see it, two main problems arise here: first, how does one define and quantify pleasure or happiness? It seems that is an overtly subjective criterion on which to predicate moral judgments and value. John Stuart Mill attempted to address this problem facing Utilitarianism in his book of the same name.<sup>13</sup> “Those who know anything about the matter are aware that every writer from Epicurus to Bentham who maintained the theory of Utility meant by it is not ‘something to be contrasted with pleasure but pleasure itself together with the absence of pain’”<sup>14</sup> though later he attempts to qualify pleasure in the two main categories of higher and lower pleasures, I still have serious misgivings with this account of the good. His argument goes like this:

1. People experience two types of pleasure, A and B
2. People who have enjoyed both pleasures seem to prefer A over B
3. A is a higher pleasure compared to B
4. A is better than B.

At this point I believe it becomes clear that this argument is a little better than hedonism at this point. This is relativistic in two major ways: first, Pleasure, while seemingly stable across the human experience, ultimately comes down to personal preference and neural

---

<sup>13</sup> John Stuart Mill. *Utilitarianism*. Fraser Magazine, London. 1861. E book. [www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/mill1863.pdf](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/mill1863.pdf). Copyright 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Mill, Page 4.

wiring. While bathing is generally seen as a pleasurable activity to most people, someone stricken with Allodynia<sup>15</sup> would wholeheartedly disagree.

The second problem as I see it stems from the first. How can an agent make an objective moral judgment if the ethical system in place denies that such judgments are possible? Even if we ruled out people who specific medical conditions like the one mentioned here, how could one quantify one pleasure versus the other? Sexual intercourse and Opera are both intensely pleasurable, but in completely non-fungible ways. Taking this into account, I do not see how utilitarianism can escape from the relativist camp.

The third normative theory I believe falls under the relativist meta-ethical world view is social contract theory. Written on by many thinkers over the centuries, this theory centers around what Thomas Hobbes referred to as the “State of Nature”, a view of human existence prior to civilization in which he affectionately describes life as “nasty, brutish, and short” and as a “war against all”.<sup>16</sup> The ethical theory arises out of man’s need to survive such a horrendous existence, and this is most effectively accomplished by a mutual covenant where all partaking members consent to collectively give up some of their rights for the greater good—in other words, agent A promises not to perform act B as long as agent C promises not to perform act B either.

Those who disagree with me will say that social contract theory isn’t relativistic because of the universal applicability of the above claim. Most societies on earth have prohibitions against murder, theft, and differing forms of public indecency (“action B”).

---

<sup>15</sup> Allodynia is a medical condition characterized by extreme pain upon stimulation of the skin, even from activities that would normally be enjoyable. This condition was made famous by Howard Hughes who struggled with Allodynia the majority of his life.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Hobbes. Leviathan. London. 1651

That being said, I do not believe such a claim can be truly universal--one need not even imagine a potential world where “action B” is something totally random—this occurs across cultures all the time.<sup>17</sup> I also take issue with the hierarchical biases present with this theory—as many feminist and other social critics will point out, the social contract present in a feudal society would completely disenfranchise those on the lower rungs of the social order. For example, in Medieval Japan it was considered acceptable for a samurai to test his newly forged sword by killing any beggar he came across on his land. Similarly, in certain parts of sub-Saharan Africa, female genital mutilation is still widely practiced as a means of preventing female infidelity. In both of these societies, the contract being practiced is entirely predicated on those exercising control. This makes the theory relative to those practicing it and provides shaky footing at best for establishing an objective measure of agent culpability.

As a slight anecdote, the last component to consider, and potentially the saving grace for the utilitarian normative view is consequentialism. Consequentialism, while often going hand and hand with the hedonistic aspects of utilitarianism, does offer the redemptive quality for my purpose in that agents are held accountable for the results they produce. Regardless of the society where it is being practiced, the agent in question would still have to answer for whatever it was he or she brought about. (this will become relevant later on in my argument)

## **Moral Absolutism**

---

<sup>17</sup> For example, in aboriginal Australian culture it is considered wrong to mention the names of the dead once they have passed on from this life—such an action is deemed unlucky and also disrespectful to the person in question. In most western societies, not referring to or talking about a dead relative on purpose would be considered extremely rude and an insult to the memory of that individual. This cultural dissonance did not arise out of any biological or societal necessity as some critics would normally point out when it comes to most cultural difference, it is completely contingent on the culture practicing the individual action.



Moral absolutism holds that it is not only possible for agents to know right and wrong, but that it is morally necessary for one to discern these things as part of human flourishing. As mentioned above, moral absolutism has its roots in the theories of some of the most ancient thinkers in western thought and pervades throughout the majority of prominent faith systems as a part of a larger religious metaphysical worldview (though each of these religions may have vastly different verdicts regarding the source, motivations, and moral maxims derived from said worldview).

It should come as no surprise after taking this into account that one of the most prevalent normative ethical constructs to arise from this meta-ethical worldview is Divine Command Theory. Initially made infamous by Plato in the *Euthyphro*, Divine Command Theory holds the view that we can know what is right and wrong based on the instruction from a divine source, namely holy texts as interpreted by religious scholars and leaders. This theory has taken American Protestantism by storm over the last century and consequently enjoys a place of honor amongst pop Christianity in the United States and abroad, with the bible serving as the primary means by which humans are to discern the proper way to conduct their lives and to use as a source of goodness on earth.

The second normative theory to materialize out of moral realism is Natural Law Theory. Originally conceived in antiquity by Aristotle, the concept of Natural Law came to be popularized in the western canon by the medieval philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas. Natural Law Theory holds that we can discern what is right and wrong through observation of the physical universe—that the divinely-preordained order we see in nature is indicative of good and likewise the disruption of that order as evil. Due to the work and influence of St. Thomas on reconciling Aristotelian thought with Christianity,

Natural Law Theory enjoys the position of authority for the Roman Catholic Church and consequently for over one billion people worldwide.

The most unique view certainly to fit within the theory of moral absolutism is Deontological ethics. Theorized by the continental philosopher Immanuel Kant in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Deontology holds that the moral maxims prescribed by it are entirely *a priori*, meaning they exist independently of anything we usually relegate to the realm of experience and that all such moral maxims are absolute and unflinching no matter the circumstance. Murder, Theft, and lying are all and will always be wrong—even if done for a supposedly moral reason such as protecting the innocent from harm or retrieving a previously stolen item for its original owner. I call Deontology unique not because of the severity of its claims but rather because it asserts them without necessitating the authority of a divine power.

### **Putting it Together**

Where does this leave us? For 15 pages I have lead my readers down a trail covering the metaphysical accounts of free will and meta-ethical accounts of morality and the normative theories they entail. Now comes the time for me to reconcile these accounts together in order to what I assert to be the mutually exclusive options we face—either meta-ethically objective morality exists and humans as agents are culpable for their actions, or we cannot reconcile any of the theories of morality with our metaphysical accounts of free will and the whole thing falls apart.

First up to bat is determinism. Determinism rules out culpability by asserting that all of our choices are predetermined before we make them and our interactions with the greater universe are contingent in some way on either atomic movement, biology or

psychological conditioning. (I have a feeling Nietzsche would really enjoy that assessment) The endpoint with this theory is that we do not have free will. Determinism is out.

Compatibilism is, by its very nature, an interesting case. Due to the nature of freedom in allowing for causation the compatibilist worldview, two normative theories immediately come to mind—divine command theory and Deontology. Divine command theory is compatible with metaphysical compatibilism because God (one of the potential constraints on free will being divine foreknowledge) is the source of all morality in this case. In the normative account of Divine command theory, God serves as both the beginning and the end of human moral discourse, challenging agents to perform actions according to his plan for humanity. Deontology is also compatible with compatibilism in that the agent is bringing about the action for its own sake—the fact that moral truths are seen as *a priori* serves as both a motivating and qualifying factor for culpability within this meta-ethical worldview.

And now we come to Libertarianism. Libertarianism asserts wholeheartedly that human agents have free will, and thus said agents are entirely culpable here. What does this mean for our normative considerations? The first thing we can infer from libertarianism is that if we are indeed metaphysically free, it is for two potential reasons. The first is that a higher power endowed us with the ability to exercise our moral muscles to find our way in the universe—this fits nicely with divine command theory, deontology, and the slim glimmer of hope found in the consequentialist aspect of utilitarianism. The point is, metaphysical libertarianism is a strong candidate for discerning meta-ethical and normative principles. On the other hand, if libertarianism is true because the universe is

came about from a random singularity at some point in the distant past, then we are put in an interesting place when it comes to discerning human culpability. This is the one place where metaphysical nihilism could actually (albeit strangely) serve as a morally informative principle by showing implying the most freeing account of free will we could imagine: If God (or any other objective, all powerful, vindictive force does not exist, we would not have to interact with the moral parameters set by objective accounts of morality. If the universe is truly indeterminated in the context specified here, then meta-ethical morality does not and cannot exist in an objective sense.

If I was a gambling man, I would put my money on the libertarian account of metaphysics, owing my decision to the way it provides both metaphysical and meta-ethical space to maneuver in order to uncover the mystery of how man is to live. As Dr. Fischer said in his presentation referenced at the beginning of this paper, “you are more than welcome to disagree with me.”

And now we have reached the end. I would like to quote Dr. Fischer by saying that “Even if I somehow discovered there is but one path into the future, I would still care deeply how I walked down that path. I would aspire to walk with grace and dignity. I would want to have a sense of humor. Most of all, I would want to do it my way.”<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> John Martin Fischer. *The Metaphysics of Free Will*. Page 216. Blackwell Publishers, Inc. 1994. Print

## Bibliography

1. Mason Marshall. Handout, “Binkyism” Modern Philosophy Course. Pepperdine University, Spring 2015
2. Kane, Robert. A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will. Page 2. Oxford University Press. 2005.
3. Robert Kane. Ethics and the Quest for Good. Page 8. Cambridge University Press. 2010. E Book
4. John Stuart Mill. Utilitarianism. Fraser Magazine, London. 1861. E book.  
[www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/mill1863.pdf](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/mill1863.pdf). Copyright 2012.
5. Thomas Hobbes. Leviathan. London. 1651
6. John Martin Fischer. The Metaphysics of Free Will. Page 216. Blackwell Publishers, Inc. 1994. Print