believe determinism to be incompatible with free will *merely* because determinism implied them. Many people probably have confused determinism with constraint or control or fatalism or mechanism, and so thought determinism to be incompatible with free will for the wrong reasons.

But if these are bad reasons for thinking free will and determinism are incompatible, there may nonetheless be some good reasons. We may still wonder whether determinism *itself* might not conflict with free will—not because it implies constraint, control, and so on, but *just because it is determinism.* For it seems that if determinism is true, there is only one possible future (hence no garden of many forking paths into the future); and this fact alone seems to rule out the possibility of free will and responsibility for actions.

To this objection, compatibilists issue a challenge of their own. "If there is an argument to show that determinism *must* be incompatible with free will, *just because* it is determinism, and *not* because it implies constraint or control by others or fatalism or mechanism, then provide us with such a direct argument for the incompatibility of free will and determinism! In short, "prove it." In the next chapter, we will consider how incompatibilists try to meet this challenge.

An Addendum on the Term Soft Determinism

In many writings on free will, compatibilists are often referred to as *soft determinists*. Soft determinists are compatibilists who also believe that determinism is true. Classical compatibilists, such as Hobbes, Hume, and Mill, were also soft determinists, since they believed that determinism was true in addition to believing that freedom and determinism were compatible.

Suggested Reading

A lively and readable defense of compatibilism is Daniel Dennett's *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* (MIT, 1984). Defenses of classical compatibilism appear in essays by J.J.C. Smart (in Gary Watson, ed., *Free Will* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 2003]) and Kai Nielsen (in Robert Kane, ed., *Free Will*). Other selections from classical compatibilists are contained in Derk Pereboom, ed., *Free Will* (Hackett, 1997); and classical compatibilist positions are discussed in Ilham Dilman's historical introduction, *Free Will* (Routledge, 1999).

CHAPTER 3

Incompatibilism

1. The Consequence Argument

The popularity of compatibilism among modern philosophers and scientists means that *incompatibilists*—those who hold the traditional belief that free will and determinism are in conflict—must provide arguments to support their position. Incompatibilists cannot merely rely on their intuitions about forking paths into the future to make their case, as in chapter 1. They must back up their intuitions with arguments that show why free will and determinism must be incompatible. New arguments for incompatibilism have indeed been proposed in modern philosophy to meet this challenge. The most widely discussed of these new arguments for the incompatibility of free will and determinism is the subject of this chapter.

The argument is called the Consequence Argument, and it is stated informally as follows by one of its proponents, Peter van Inwagen:

> 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 own acts) are not up to us.[1]

To say it is not "up to us" what "went on before we were born," or "what the laws of nature are," is to say that there is nothing we can now do to change the past or alter the laws of nature (such things are beyond our control). This gives us two premises of the Consequence Argument.

(1) There is nothing we can now do to change the past.
(2) There is nothing we can now do to change the laws of nature.

Putting these two premises together, we get

(3) There is nothing we can now do to change the past and the laws of nature.

But if determinism is true, then

(4) Our present actions are the necessary consequences of the past and the laws of nature. (Or, equivalently, it is necessary that, given the past and the laws of nature, our present actions occur.)

So, if determinism is true, it seems that

(5) There is nothing we can now do to change the fact that our present actions are the necessary consequences of the past and the laws of nature.

But if there is nothing we can now do to change the past and the laws of nature (which is step 3) *and* nothing we can now do to change the fact that our present actions are the necessary consequences of the past and the laws of nature (step 5), it would seem to follow that, if determinism is true (step 4), then

(6) There is nothing we can now do to change the fact that our present actions occur.

In other words, we *cannot now do otherwise* than we actually do. Since this argument can be applied to any agents and actions at any times, we can infer from it that *if determinism is true, no one can ever do otherwise;* and if free will requires the power to do otherwise, then no one has free will.

2. Assessing the Argument

Van Inwagen thinks the first two premises of this Consequence Argument are undeniable. We cannot now change the past (1) or the laws of nature (2). Step 3 states what appears to be a simple consequence of premises 1 and 2: if you can't change the past or the laws, then you can't change the conjunction of both of them. Premise 4 simply states what is implied by the definition of determinism: if determinism is true, then our actions are the necessary consequences of the past and laws of nature in the sense that they *must* occur, *given* the past and the laws. By asserting premise 4, of course, the argument is assuming the truth of determinism. But it is doing so only hypothetically, in order to show that, *if* determinism is true (premise 4), *then* no one could have done otherwise (6). So the

Consequence Argument does not depend on determinism's actually being true; rather, it seeks to show what determinism would imply (no free will), *if* it were true.

We are left to assess steps 5 and 6. How are they arrived at? Step 5 ("There is nothing we can now do to change the fact that our present actions are the necessary consequences of the past and the laws of nature") follows from premise 4 by virtue of a rule that van Inwagen calls

Rule Alpha. There is nothing anyone can do to change what *must* be the case (or what is necessarily so).

This rule gets us from premise 4 to step 5 in the following way. According to premise 4, it *must be that,* given laws of nature and the past, our present actions occur. But Rule Alpha says no one can now change *what must be*. So it follows that we cannot now change the fact that, given the laws of nature and the past, our present actions occur—which is what step 5 says.

Van Inwagen thinks this Rule Alpha is also undeniable. How, he asks, could anyone change what is necessarily so? If it is necessarily so that 2 + 2 = 4, then no one can change that; and if someone could change the fact that 2 + 2 = 4, then it would not be necessarily so.

This brings us to the conclusion of the argument, step (6): "There is nothing we can now do to change the fact that our present actions occur." This conclusion follows from earlier steps, as noted, by virtue of the following inference: if there is nothing we can now do to change the past and the laws of nature (step 3) and nothing we can now do to change the fact that our present actions are the necessary consequences of the past and the laws of nature (step 5), then there is nothing we can now do to change the fact that our present actions occur (6). This inference involves a second rule that van Inwagen calls

Rule Beta. If there is nothing anyone can do to change X, and nothing anyone can do to change the fact that Y is a necessary consequence of X, then there is nothing anyone can do to change Y either.

Rule Beta has been called a "Transfer of Powerlessness Principle." For it says in effect that if we are "powerless" to change X, and if Y is necessarily going to occur if X does, and we are powerless to change that also, then we are also powerless to change Y. In other words, our powerlessness to change X "transfers" to anything that necessarily follows from X.

This Rule Beta also seems intuitively correct, according to van Inwagen. If we can't do anything to prevent X from occurring and Y is *necessarily* going to occur if X does, how could we do anything to prevent Y from occurring? Consider an example. Suppose the sun is going to explode in the year 2050 and there is nothing we can now do to change that fact. There

is also nothing we can now do to change the fact that, if the sun explodes in 2050, all life on earth will end in 2050. If both these claims are true, it seems obvious that there is nothing anyone can now do to change the fact that all life on earth will end in 2050. Here is another example. If there is nothing anyone can now do to change the laws of nature, and nothing anyone can now do to change the fact that the laws of nature entail that nothing goes faster than the speed of light, then there is nothing anyone can now do to change the fact that nothing goes faster than the speed of light.

One could go on adding examples like these supporting Rule Beta. Suffice it to say that Rule Beta does *seem* to be as undeniable as Rule Alpha (which says that no one can change what is necessarily so); and if Rule Beta is also valid, since the other premises of the Consequence Argument seem undeniable, the argument would be both valid and sound, as van Inwagen and other incompatibilists claim. The Consequence Argument would show that determinism conflicts with anyone's power to do otherwise and thus conflicts with free will.

3. An Objection Concerning "Can" and "Power"

The Consequence Argument is a powerful argument for the incompatibility of free will and determinism, and it has swayed many persons. But it is also a controversial argument and has generated much debate. As you would expect, compatibilists and soft determinists reject the Consequence Argument. They must reject it or their views would be refuted in one fell swoop. But where do compatibilists and other critics of the Consequence Argument think it goes wrong, if it goes wrong at all? Most critics of the argument tend to focus on the crucial expression "There is nothing we can now do to change . . ." which appears in many steps of the version of the Consequence Argument presented in section 2. This expression contains the word "can"—one of the most difficult words in the language to interpret.

Talking about what persons "can" (and "cannot") do is talking about their *powers* or *abilities*. So how you interpret persons' powers and abilities has an obvious bearing on the Consequence Argument. For example, compatibilist critics of the Consequence Argument often argue that if you interpret terms like "can," "power," and "ability" in the *hypothetical* way proposed by classical compatibilists, the Consequence Argument will fail. As we saw in chapter 2, according to classical compatibilists, to say

> "You *can* (or you have the *power* or the *ability*) to do something"

means there are no *constraints* or *impediments* preventing you from doing it, so that

> "You *would* do it, *if* you chose or wanted to do it."

Such an analysis of "can," "power," or "ability" is called "hypothetical" (or "conditional") because it has an "if" in it. But how does such an analysis refute the Consequence Argument? First, consider the initial two premises of the Consequence Argument: "There is nothing we can now do to change the past" and "There is nothing we can now do to change the laws of nature." On the hypothetical analysis of "can," to say we can change the past or the laws would mean that

> "We *would* change the past or the laws of nature, *if* we *chose* or *wanted* to."

Now this claim is false. No persons would change the past or the laws of nature, *even if* they chose or wanted to, because no one has the power or ability to do it. So the initial *premises* of the Consequence Argument come out *true* on this compatibilist analysis. There is nothing anyone can now do to change the past and the laws of nature *even on the hypothetical analysis of "can"* favored by many compatibilists.

But the hypothetical analysis gives a different answer when we consider the *conclusion* of the Consequence Argument: "There is nothing any persons can do to change the fact that their present actions occur," or in other words, "No persons can do otherwise than they actually do." To show why this conclusion fails on the hypothetical analysis of "can," consider a simple everyday action, such as Molly's raising her hand. To say that Molly could have done otherwise than raise her hand (to say, for example, that she could have kept her hand by her side) means, on the hypothetical analysis, that

> "She would have done otherwise than raise her hand, if she had chosen or wanted to do otherwise."

Now, as noted in chapter 2, this hypothetical claim can be true even if Molly's action was determined. For the hypothetical claim simply implies that Molly would have done otherwise, *if the past had been different in some way*—that is, if (contrary to fact) she had chosen or wanted differently.

Note that making this hypothetical claim does not imply that Molly could have *changed* the past or the laws of nature from what they actually were. The hypothetical claim merely means that no constraints or impediments would have prevented her from acting differently, *if she had chosen or wanted differently;* and this may well be true even though she did *not* in

fact choose or want differently. In other words, with ordinary everyday actions, such as raising one's hand or getting on a bus, there may *sometimes* be constraints preventing us from doing them or doing otherwise (we may be tied up, paralyzed, or coerced). But often there may be no such constraints preventing us from doing these everyday things; and so we could have done them if we had wanted. By contrast, there are *always* constraints preventing us from changing the past and laws of nature.

As a result, the *premises* of the Consequence Argument come out *true* on the compatibilist hypothetical analysis of "can": Molly *cannot* change the past or the laws of nature, even if she wants to. But the *conclusion* of the Consequence Argument comes out *false:* Molly *can* nonetheless sometimes do otherwise than she actually does (e.g., do otherwise than raise her hand), in the hypothetical sense, because nothing *would* have prevented her, if she had wanted to. So, on the hypothetical analysis, the Consequence Argument would have true premises but a false conclusion, and it would be an invalid argument.

You might wonder at this point what *part* of the Consequence Argument goes wrong in this case—which premise or rule. The answer is Rule Beta. Even defenders of the Consequence Argument, such as van Inwagen, concede that Rule Beta is the hardest part of the argument to defend (though they themselves believe Rule Beta is valid). Rule Beta licenses the inference that gets one to the conclusion of the Consequence Argument (step 6), from steps 1 to 5: if there is nothing we can now do to change the past and nothing we can now do to change the fact that our present actions are the necessary consequences of the past and the laws, then we cannot now do otherwise than we actually do. On the compatibilist hypothetical analysis of "can," the premises of this inference are true, while its conclusion is false. For on the hypothetical analysis of "can" there *is* nothing we can now do to change the past and the laws of nature, but there is something we can now do to change ordinary actions, such as raising our hand. Rule Beta is therefore invalid (it has counterexamples); and the Consequence Argument fails.

4. Defenders of the Consequence Argument Respond

Now this objection to the Consequence Argument works, of course, only *if* the hypothetical analysis of "can," "power," or "ability" favored by classical compatibilists is correct. But why should we believe this hypothetical analysis of "can" and "power"? Defenders of the Consequence Argument, such as van Inwagen and Carl Ginet, see no good reason to believe in the compatibilists' analysis of these notions and so they typically

respond to the above argument in the following way:

> So the hypothetical analyses of "can" (or "power" and "could have done otherwise") that you compatibilists favor would refute Rule Beta and the Consequence Argument. Should that make us incompatibilist defenders of the Consequence Argument doubt Rule Beta and the Consequence Argument? Not at all. It just gives us another reason for doubting your compatibilist hypothetical analysis of "can," which we never thought was very plausible in the first place. If your analysis allows you to say that Molly can do otherwise (than raise her hand), even though she can't change the past and the laws of nature and even though her action (of raising her hand) is a necessary consequence of the past and the laws of nature, *then something must be wrong with the hypothetical analysis* of "can" that you compatibilists favor. The premises and rules of the Consequence Argument, including Rule Beta, seem more intuitively true to us than any hypothetical analysis of "can." So, if we have to reject one or the other, we would reject your compatibilist analysis rather than the Consequence Argument. In fact, hypothetical analyses of "can" and "could have done otherwise" that many compatibilists favor are subject to serious objections anyway. So they should be rejected in any case and not just because one favors the Consequence Argument.[2]

What are the "serious objections" to hypothetical analyses of "can" and "could have done otherwise" referred to in this passage? The objection that many philosophers regard as the most serious goes like this: hypothetical analyses of "can" and "could have done otherwise" sometimes (wrongly) tell us that agents can do otherwise, or could have done otherwise, in cases where it is clear that the agents could *not* have done otherwise. So the hypothetical analyses must be wrong. Here is an example of Michael McKenna's illustrating this objection. Suppose that Danielle has been scarred by a terrible childhood accident involving a blond Labrador retriever. The accident rendered her

> psychologically incapable of wanting to touch a blond haired dog. Imagine that, on her sixteenth birthday, unaware of her condition, her father brings her two puppies to choose between, one being a blond haired Lab, the other a black haired Lab. He tells Danielle just to pick up whichever of the two she pleases and that he will return the other puppy to the pet store. Danielle happily, and unencumbered, does what she wants and picks up the black Lab.[3]

Was Danielle free to *do otherwise* (*could* she have done otherwise) than pick up the black Lab? It seems not, McKenna says. Given her traumatic childhood experience, she cannot even form a *want* to touch a blond-haired Lab, hence she could not pick up one.

But notice that the compatibilist hypothetical analysis of "she could have done otherwise" would be true in this case: *If* Danielle *did* want to pick up the blond-haired Lab, then she would have done so. So the hypothetical analysis gives us the wrong answer in this case and in many other similar cases. It tells us Danielle could have done otherwise (because she would have, if she had wanted), when in fact she could *not* have done otherwise (because she could not have *wanted* to do otherwise).

The problem with the hypothetical analysis brought out by this example is the following: to truly capture the meaning of "She *could* have done otherwise," it is not good enough to simply say "She *would* have done otherwise, *if* she had wanted to"; one must add "*and* she *could also have wanted* to do otherwise." But then the hypothetical analysis merely pushes the question of whether the agent could have *done* otherwise back to another question of whether the agent could have *wanted* or *chosen* (or *willed*) to do otherwise. And answering this further question requires another "could" statement ("She could have wanted or chosen to do otherwise"), which in turn requires another hypothetical analysis: "She would have wanted or chosen to do otherwise, *if* she had *wanted or chosen to want or choose* otherwise." And the same question would arise about this further hypothetical analysis, requiring yet another "could" statement to be analyzed, and so on indefinitely.

The result is an infinite regress that would never allow one to eliminate the word "could" and would never allow one to definitively answer the original question of whether the agent could have done otherwise—which shows that something has gone wrong with the hypothetical analysis. For reasons such as this, defenders of the Consequence Argument think the hypothetical analysis of "could have done otherwise" favored by classical compatibilists is flawed. Such an analysis would undermine the Consequence Argument, if it were correct. But there are reasons to think it is not correct.

At this point, debates about the Consequence Argument tend to reach an impasse. Defenders of the Consequence Argument think its premises and rules are far more plausible than any compatibilist analysis of "could have done otherwise" (hypothetical or otherwise), while compatibilists obviously think the opposite. Many compatibilists today do concede that the *classical* compatibilist analysis of "could have done otherwise" may be flawed, for the reasons just given or for other reasons. But these same modern compatibilists insist that defenders of the Consequence Argument are begging the question when they assume that *no* compatibilist analysis of "could have done otherwise" could possibly be right, merely because the classical compatibilist analysis is flawed.

Perhaps this is so. But then the burden of proof lies with compatibilis to give a better account of "could have done otherwise" than classic compatibilists have offered—or to find some other way to refute the Co sequence Argument. We shall see in later chapters that modern compat bilists have tried to do one or another of these two things. Some mode compatibilists have sought better compatibilist analyses of "could ha done otherwise." Others have sought entirely new ways of refuting t Consequence Argument.

Suggested Reading

Van Inwagen's defense of the Consequence Argument is in his *An Essay on Free W* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983). The Consequence Argument is also defended by Carl Gi in *On Action* (Cambridge, 1990). Other discussions for and against the Consequen Argument are included in the collections of readings cited in the suggested readings chapter 1.