

Peer Review

Review of: "Free Will: Reality and Perception"

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I think that this is really two papers. One is about the metaphysics of free will; the other is about the pragmatic implications of beliefs about free will (i.e., the impact of beliefs about free will on one's psychology and behavior). My sense is that these two topics are very different and therefore should not be combined into one paper. The pragmatic (or doxastic) discussion need not presuppose or defend any particular metaphysical position, including skepticism. At most, it need only define the metaphysical terms.

My commentary below focuses entirely on Prof. Krueger's critiques of metaphysical libertarianism and compatibilism.

In the opening section, Prof. Krueger interprets metaphysical libertarianism as a theory according to which "human beings . . . have the capacity to make their choices and choose their behavior regardless of antecedent causes, conditions, or constraints . . ." This isn't quite right. For metaphysical libertarians, "antecedent causes, conditions, or constraints" may very well play a causal role in determining choices and behavior. It's just that genuinely free choices and actions are not fully caused by these "antecedent causes, conditions, or constraints". Instead, the agent (or person or self) herself constitutes an essential, ineliminable factor, where the agent is presumed to be the locus or center of control, which is not controlled (i.e., not necessitated, as opposed to influenced) by anything else.

For example, if Alice is deliberating about what to do, her ultimate decision is genuinely free according to the metaphysical libertarian if Alice herself – Alice's "self" – finally tipped the balance between the two sets of reasons for acting, even if she did not freely cause or create these sets of reasons or the precise situation in which she is deliberating. The decision was still genuinely free because the agent – Alice's self – was not determined by anything else to tip the balance as it does. Alice herself – not merely a collection of causes outside Alice's control – determined or helped determine what she decided.

No doubt this is a controversial metaphysical position, but it is not incoherent or obviously false. I have addressed the three main arguments against it – what I refer to as the Randomness Objection, the Constitutive Luck Objection, and the Physicalist Objection – in “On Three Arguments Against Metaphysical Libertarianism” ([Review of Metaphysics](#) 76, 725–48 (June 2023)). I further argue in this article that, contrary to free-will skeptics, a choice or decision can indeed satisfy all four conditions of full, genuine self-determinism: rationality, control, ultimacy, and physicalism.

With regard to compatibilism, I don’t really understand Prof. Krueger’s arguments against it. So instead of addressing them, I will simply summarize here my own position. Like Prof. Krueger, I reject compatibilism, but I don’t categorically reject it; I fully accept compatibilists’ assumption that some conditions other than self-determinism – minimal rationality (or reasons-responsiveness), reflectively endorsed identification with one’s values or will, and an absence of coercion, compulsion, and subconscious manipulation – are necessary for free will. I reject only the compatibilist’s assumption that these conditions are sufficient for free will. As I suggested above, indeterminism is still necessary to open up room for full, genuine self-determinism.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.