

# Review of: "How to Amend Christian List's Theory on Free Will to Answer the Challenge from Indeterminism"

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## Review

Philosophical debates about free will often commence with the authors reflecting on their alignment with one of the four primary schools of thought: "Hard" determinism, "Hard" incompatibilism, Compatibilism, or Libertarianism. Prof. Christian List, whose work is the focus of this article, identifies himself as a libertarian, albeit one who accepts determinism at the basic levels of human functioning. The author of the reviewed paper, while engaging with and challenging List's arguments, also endeavors to fortify them, thus establishing a unique perspective on free will. Both List and the author, perhaps unintentionally (as elaborated later), find themselves straddling the boundary between compatibilism and libertarianism. This stance injects a refreshing perspective into a debate that has spanned centuries. However, it also demands considerable philosophical finesse, a kind of "tightrope walking skills", particularly in articulating differences in viewpoints when both authors occupy the same conceptual "square" in the free will discourse.

Regarding the article's potential for publication, I believe it certainly possesses merit. Nevertheless, there are key aspects within the article that beckon clarification and elaboration, which are crucial for it to be considered alongside List's seminal work.

My primary concern pertains to the author's interpretation of the problem of control loss in libertarianism.

p. 2: "Stated like this, List's theory runs into trouble with the most important criticism against libertarian (indeterministic) theories of free will, what he himself calls the challenge from indeterminism: if our choices are indeterministic, they are as if they were random, and they cannot be meaningfully controlled by us."

p. 3: "Back to the challenge from indeterminism. Simply put, it goes something like this: if an agent's choices are indeterministic, then nothing strictly makes it so that one choice is made rather than another. Thus, they are random or up to chance in some sense, and not under the control of the agent. Such acts are not free."

p. 4: "The claim that indeterminism means lack of reasons-responsiveness is not in any way mitigated by saying that the indeterministic action is still caused by the agent and thus under their control."

I disagree with the notion that indeterministic decision-making is inherently uncontrollable. The act of decision-making itself (irrespective of its rationale or origin) is an effect of control. It is this control that should be defined as "self-control". Therefore, viewing indeterminism as synonymous with random choice is a misinterpretation, as I see it. Indeterminism

merely suggests that choices are not preordained by external or impersonal internal factors or their agents.

The second point of critique relates to the ambiguity in the author's overarching stance on List's theories.

p. 2: "I am generally opposed to libertarianism as a metaphysical analysis because I think that the challenge from indeterminism hits so hard that it shows that the whole idea of free will involving indeterminism (or equivalently, contradicting determinism as such) is misguided."

Initially, the author's stance appears indistinct. If one opposes libertarianism fundamentally, it should be presented as a comprehensive counterpoint to List's whole theory. However, the author suggests that, with certain modifications, List's perspective might be acceptable.

My final observation concerns the lack of psychological insights in the article. If the author intends to introduce new layers of cognitive processes between List's deterministic "lower" and freely chosen "upper" decision-making levels, then these should correlate with psychological concepts such as consciousness and subconsciousness, external vs. internal motivation, or their association with emotions and farther toward moral responsibility. Numerous studies have delved into these topics. See examples:

Feltz, B., Missal, M., & Sims, A. (eds.), (2019). *The Mental, the Physical and the Informational*. Leiden-Boston: Brill Rodopi.

Lebed, F. (2023). Free Will: Unlikely to Exist in Light of Psychological Theories; It "Floats" in the Complexity Paradigm. *Philosophical Psychology*. Online article: 10.1080/09515089.2023.2228336.

Libet, B. (1999). Do We Have Free Will? *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 6(8-9), 47-57.

Obhi, S.S. & Haggard, P. (2004). Free Will and Free Won't. *American Scientist*; Research Triangle Park, 92(4), 358-365.

Wegner, D.M. (2003). The Mind's Best Trick: How We Experience Conscious Will. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 7(2), 0–69. doi:10.1016/s1364-6613(03)00002-0

Yet, I believe this oversight is a significant shortcoming in the long-standing philosophical discourse on free will.

In conclusion, it is primarily these first and third points that restrain me from endorsing the article for publication in its current form.

Sincerely,

The Reviewer