

# Review of: "Unfettered Compatibilism"

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Overall, it is a pretty interesting paper that may provide a new perspective on how to think about free will. I'm struggling, however, understanding what the author means by self-rule. According to the author: "Self-rule as the power of choosing is not the ability to choose one action over another. It is the ability to willfully assent to or to resist an impulse to act." Our paradigmatic cases of actions are cases of bodily motions. However, some people can do arithmetic without moving fingers. While some students minds wander in class, other bored students actively imagine a sunny seaside resort.

When I read "the ability to *willfully* assent to or resist an impulse to act" it seems to me that the assenting or resisting is something the agent does...and does willfully. But, if so, doesn't that make the assenting or resisting a mental action? If the ability to assent to or to resist an impulse to act are mental actions, then having that ability entails having the ability to choose one action over another (albeit a mental action). Assuming that willfully assenting to an impulse to act is a mental action, it seems that unfettered compatibilism risks becoming a form of classical compatibilism focusing only on mental actions.

Consider two different possible worlds. In one world a horse willfully drags the wagon while in the other the horse is drug along with the wagon. Every detail of these worlds outside of the horse's head could be identical. Every footfall landing in exactly the same place. Still, they would be two distinct possible worlds. In one world the horse willfully pulled the wagon, in the other it did not. Given that these worlds are deterministic, they would either have had to have different initial conditions or laws of nature.

Further, what the horse does in the two worlds is different. Certainly, what the horse chooses is different....and choosing seems to be a stereotypical mental action. But, arguable, in only one of these worlds does the horse pull the wagon (in the other they are pulled). Lacking the ability to perform mental actions other than those actually performed it seems that the horse is in no more control of the attitude it takes than it is of where the hooves fall.

It is also challenging to see how the Consequence argument fairs better for the unfettered compatibilist. According to the author, "our specific abilities to do otherwise are non-existent. Our freedom lies in "the manner" in which we act." If willfully assenting to or resisting an impulse to act is something we choose to do or is itself a mental action, then the Consequence argument would directly apply to that mental action. But, even if the manner in which we act was not a mental action, it would still be settled by the laws and the distant past just as much as our external bodily motion. While the Consequence Argument targets actions, it only does so because it presumes this is the locus where other theorists will place freedom. If we are to see willfully assenting to or resisting an impulse to act as something that merely happens in our minds and not something we do in our minds then the Consequence Argument would not directly apply to it. Yet,

the spirit of the Consequence Argument still seems to apply. In a deterministic world, the laws along with the distant past would have entailed the proposition that that the agent resisted the impulse to act. It seems that people who are convinced this undermines free will when resisting the impulse to act is seen as a mental action would be just as convinced (perhaps more) that it would undermine free will when resisting the impulse to act isn't a mental action (isn't something we do).