

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

Marius Usher<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tel Aviv University

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The manuscript offers a criticism and amendment of Christian List's Free-Will theory, which starts from the discussion of the problem of determinism (formalized by the author via Reason-responsivity), which leads the author to the conclusion that Indeterminism (at either physical or psychological levels) contradicts with Free-Will. Instead of placing indeterminism in the choice function, the author suggests one should place it in the function that constraint the options that are available for deliberation.

I believe that there are some interesting insights in the discussion of List's theory and even in the proposals that the author makes in this manuscript. Unfortunately, however, I believe that there are two fundamental problems at the heart of this paper, which would not make it ready for publication. A major revision would surely be needed (at a minimum) to make the manuscript relevant to a philosophy audience. Below I list what I see as the major problems:

## 1. The problem of indeterminism is not well related to Reason-sensitivity (RS), which is also incorrectly characterized in the manuscript.

First, I believe that the author made a bad choice to characterize the problem of indeterminism for Free-Will via RS. A better choice would have been to characterize it as *the problem of luck*, or via the *Disappearance agent argument* (Pereboom). Reason-sensitivity (RS) is a condition that has been proposed by J.M Fischer as an alternative to the *ability to chose otherwise*, that can be satisfied in a deterministic world. In such a world, one cannot chose otherwise, in the precisely same situation, but one can if the situation changes, so that enough reasons to do otherwise were provided. It is **incorrect**, however, to assert that RS denies indeterminism. Here is an indeterministic example that is consistent with RS.

Lets assume a thief deliberates if to steal or not (taking into account various reasons pro and con) leading him to a probability of 60% to steal (and 40% to abstain from it). Now let's provide the thief with a good reason not to steal (a police car being nearby). If this impacts the choice probability making the thief probability to steal decrease to say, 30% (and to abstain, 70%) we can say that the choice mechanism of the thief is sensitive to reasons.

Second, the RS condition is incorrectly characterized in the manuscript: **"as the ability the agent has to act based on the reasons an agent has"**. This is not Fischer's definition (and this is not just an issue of nuance),; one can have RS without an "ability to act based on the reasons an agent has". Consider, for example, an agent that is subject to a Frankfurt type counterfactual scenario (a neurosurgeon monitors his brain centers and is ready to intervene, if (and only if) the agent shows any sign of deciding contra to what the neurosurgeon intends). Obviously such an agent can not act based

his reasons, because if his reasons contradicted the intention of the counterfactual intervener, this would have overridden the agent's reasons making him act according to his intention. Such Frankfurt counterfactual scenarios are key for Fischer's *RS* condition, which is aimed to secure responsibility for such agents. Furthermore, an indeterministic agent can act on reasons in a probabilistic way – the reasons affecting his choice probability. Thus an indeterministic agent is able to act based on reasons. Finally, the condition that the author uses “***the ability the agent has to act based on the reasons an agent has***” may associate better with what was recently labeled as (*Teleological guided control*; Usher (2018). Agency, Teleological Control and Robust Causation. *Philosophy and Phenom. Research.*) – which is characterized as “the ability to maintain course and achieve a goal, in the face of a variety of possible impediments, such as unexpected obstacles in the environment or the actions of other agents.”

## 2. Wrong way to characterize indeterminism in Libertarian theories

The criticism brought against standard Libertarian theories seem to deal with a straw-man theory, according which when an agent who deliberates between doing A or B, and realizing she has better reasons that favor A, may do B instead due to indeterminism. However, very few Libertarians would endorse such an implausible role for indeterminism in choice. A more reasonable view would apply indeterminism to what are often called “torn decisions” (Balaguer), - decisions in which the agent feels that the reason for A and for B balance up so that she has no sufficient reason to endorse either of the actions with confidence. In such situations, the choice could be indeterministic, and the strengths of reason can affect the probabilities. It is not clear that the criticism the Author raises for indeterminism as contradicting the “***the ability the agent has to act based on the reasons***” would apply to this more plausible role of indeterminism in choice.

Conclusion: to improve this manuscript the author needs to replace ***RS*** with the *problem of luck*, or the *disappearance agent argument*, which have received intensive discussions in the literature and raise more specific problems for indeterminism.