

*Mary Efrosini Gregory*

FREE WILL IN  
MONTAIGNE,  
PASCAL, DIDEROT,  
ROUSSEAU,  
VOLTAIRE AND  
SARTRE



*Currents in Comparative  
Romance Languages and Literatures*

*Free Will in Montaigne, Pascal, Diderot, Rousseau, Voltaire and Sartre* takes the reader on a journey through the corridors of time to explore the evolution of thought regarding free will. The arguments and works presented in this volume raise critical and timeless issues for ethicists, the criminal justice system and the responsible citizen. Montaigne held that humans can break out of the determinist confines of their given cultures and acquired habits by employing reason, welcoming change and promoting education. In *The Nun*, Diderot chronicles portraits of pathology, records symptoms and leaves it up to the reader to decide whether the unfortunate victims are products of nature, nurture or both. Rousseau thought that civilized man, having joined society, surrenders his free will to the general will to enjoy protection of his person, family and property. Sartre, an indeterminist, averred that since humans have the capacity to be self-reflective, they can exercise creativity with regard to who and how they choose to be from moment to moment. Freud observed that we are marionettes whose strings are commandeered by various realms competing for dominance—the conscious and subconscious; id, ego and superego. Bernays, Freud's nephew, employed psychoanalytic theory as a tool to advise corporations how to entice the public to purchase their products when confronted with a range of choices. This book opens the door to lively classroom discussion on moral issues. French literature, philosophy, psychology and political science classes will find it an invaluable source presenting a wealth of views on free will.

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*Currents in Comparative Romance  
Languages and Literatures*

Tamara Alvarez-Detrell and Michael G. Paulson  
*General Editors*

Vol. 209



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern  
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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gregory, Mary Efrosini.  
Free will in Montaigne, Pascal, Diderot, Rousseau,  
Voltaire and Sartre / Mary Efrosini Gregory.  
p. cm. — (Currents in comparative romance languages and literatures; v. 209)  
Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and index.  
1. Free will and determinism. I. Title.  
BJ1461.G74 123'.5—dc23 2012023822  
ISBN 978-1-4331-2067-1 (hardcover)  
ISBN 978-1-4539-0937-9 (e-book)  
ISSN 0893-5963

Bibliographic information published by **Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**.

**Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek** lists this publication in the “Deutsche Nationalbibliografie”; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de/>.

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[www.peterlang.com](http://www.peterlang.com)

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Printed in Germany

*This book is dedicated to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

*He did so much for us,*

*I would like to do something to honor Him.*

*He gave His created beings the gift of free will  
and the responsibility that goes with it.*

*How shall we use it?*

*I will use mine to follow Him;*

*I want to do His Will.*





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# Introduction

*The way in which the world is imagined determines at any particular moment what men will do. It does not determine what they will achieve. It determines their effort, their feelings, their hopes, not their accomplishments and results.*<sup>1</sup>

—Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (1922)

We certainly like to think that we are in charge, but are we really? How much in control are we if our subconscious is surreptitiously pulling our strings behind a curtain like the Wizard of Oz and our brain has already begun taking action a full 10 seconds before we are even aware that we have made a decision? Even though this is true, the finest minds on the planet—psychiatrists, neuroscientists, philosophers—still cannot reach a consensus and therefore, it must be conceded at the outset that if we are looking to them for the definitive answer, we will not find it. On the one hand, neuroscientists view the brain from a purely mechanical stance, much like Diderot and La Mettrie did in the eighteenth century. The *philosophes* argued that there is only cause and effect based on physical matter. Similarly, modern neuroscientists advise that multiple processes occur in the brain simultaneously that the parts are interdependent. There is only neuronal activity, no force acting from the outside; hence, we do not have free will, but respond mechanically based on heredity and environment. However, others dispense with the term “free will” and use the phrase “ability to make rational decisions” instead. They argue that if a person’s brain is not damaged and he can make a rational decision, he can be held morally responsible for his actions. However, if the brain is impaired either by heredity or environment (such as an accident), an argument can be made that he cannot be held morally responsible for his actions. When viewed from this context, it appears that most humans do indeed have the ability to employ reason and hence, they do have free will. This conclusion, reached after centuries of heated philosophical debate and fervent scientific inquiry, takes us back to the Bible, which teaches that we

do indeed have free will and that we should be held morally responsible for our actions.

As scholars debate this issue, it should be pointed out that humans around the world are busying themselves trying to influence the choices that one another make. Some parents try to impose their will on their children, while others employ reason to teach them to make wise decisions. Political activists strive to convince others to adopt their points of view. Realtors try to persuade potential homeowners to view a particular property. Corporations, advised by public relations specialists, are spending fortunes on advertising to manipulate the subconscious mind to sell their products. Pop-up ads pepper our computer screens as we try to conduct research or send an email. Politicians carefully scrutinize their speeches before delivering them to ensure that they will not offend potential supporters. Medical researchers are making stunning breakthroughs in neuroscience that hopefully, will one day permit Alzheimer's patients to regain their memory and hence, control over what happens to them. Therefore, one may be tempted to conclude that perhaps we really do have free will after all because so many people are trying to figure out how to either manipulate it or return to us after we have lost it due to illness or accident.

Let us begin by comparing the definition of free will to that of its antithesis, determinism. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines free will as "1...Spontaneous will, unconstrained choice (to do or act). Often in phr. *of one's own free will*...1611 BIBLE *Ezra* vii.13 All they...which are minded of their owne free-will to goe vp to Ierusalem...2...The power of directing our own actions without constraint by necessity or fate...1654 HOBBS *Liberty, Necess., etc.*...The third way of bringing things to pass, distinct from necessity and chance, namely freewill."<sup>2</sup>

Tomis Kapitan defines freedom thus: "First, freedom requires an absence of determination, and second, one acts and chooses freely only if these endeavors are, properly speaking, one's *own*."<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, determinism is defined as "1. The philosophical doctrine that human action is not free but necessarily determined by motives, which are regarded as external forces acting upon the will...1855 W. THOMSON in *Oxford Essays* 181 The theory of Determinism, in which the will is regarded as determined or swayed to a particular course by external inducements and formed habits, so that the consciousness of freedom rests chiefly upon an oblivion of the antecedents to our choice. 2...The doctrine that everything that happens is determined by a necessary chain of causation."<sup>4</sup>

The difference is that free will is unconstrained and determinism occurs when external forces act on the will.

## Compatibilism vs. Incompatibilism

Because external stimuli vary, there are varying degrees of determinism: an action may be *caused*, but not necessarily *forced*. A college student may be inspired to major in French because the language is beautiful, the philosophy is rich, and the professors encourage lively classroom discussion, but he is not *forced* to select it as a major; no one is pointing a gun to his head. Those who hold that free will is compatible with deterministic circumstances are called compatibilists or soft determinists.

On the other hand, there are those who posit that determinism and freedom are incompatible and thinkers who embrace this “incompatibilism” are called “incompatibilists.” We must note, however, that there are two sides to the incompatibilist spectrum. On the one end, there are those who feel that humans have no free will at all and that every action is the result of preceding deterministic actions—these incompatibilists are hard determinists.

On the other end of the incompatibilist spectrum are those who agree that freedom is incompatible with hard determinism, but who staunchly maintain that we are free to choose and act at every moment despite preceding circumstances. These thinkers are also incompatibilists, but of the libertarian or indeterminist stripe. Kapitan defines the two kinds of incompatibilism thus: “*Incompatibilism* maintains that determinism precludes freedom, though incompatibilists differ whether everything *is* determined. Those who accept determinism thereby endorse *hard determinism* (associated with eighteenth-century thinkers like d’Holbach and, recently, certain behaviorists), according to which freedom is an illusion since behavior is brought about environmental and genetic factors. Some hard determinists also deny the existence of moral responsibility. At the opposite extreme, *metaphysical libertarianism* asserts that people are free and responsible and, *a fortiori*, that the past does not determine a unique future—a position that some find enhanced by developments in quantum physics.”<sup>5</sup>

Now let us examine in detail three broad categories into which scholars group philosophers—hard determinist, soft determinist, and libertarian. These three categories indicate how much free will they allow for in their thought.

## Hard Determinism

The hard determinist holds that every action is caused and that none is uncaused. He declares that if we were to stop and thoroughly investigate all the events that precede any action, we would be able to identify its cause(s); it may even be a long chain of cause and effect. Therefore, because there are antecedent causes for every action, the hard determinist will argue that no action is free and that free will does not exist.

Thales (6<sup>th</sup> century BC), Leucippus of Miletus (5<sup>th</sup> century BC), his pupil, Democritus (460–370 BC), Epicurus of Samos (341–270 BC), and Lucretius (first century BC) were early hard determinists who held that all events that transpire in the physical universe are the results of the random collision of atoms. They averred that random molecular activity, not the capacity of rational agents to choose a course of action, is the foundation of human experience. Leucippus is the founder of the atomic doctrine of matter. His student, Democritus, also held that all matter is comprised of solid, concrete atoms. These atoms are eternal and uncaused and they are perpetually rearranged by motion, which originates from a preceding motion. Epicurus agreed that the universe result from the random collision of atoms. Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things* (first century BC) is the fullest extant statement of the physical theory of Epicurus. Lucretius used the term *clinamen* (swerve in Latin) to describe the random motion of atoms.

Epicurus and Lucretius were also hedonists and held that pleasure is the sole motive of human behavior, including the inclination toward religion. They maintained that all human action tends to maximize pleasure. Thus, they were atomists, hedonists, and atheists who denied free will.

Not all the ancients agreed with the atomists. Plato (427–347 BC) repudiated the views of Democritus not only because the latter held that the universe is the result of random chance, but also because he denied the existence of the soul. Plato maintained that there is such a thing as the soul and that reason arises from the functioning of the soul's higher, rational part.

In the *Republic* (*Πολιτεία*), Plato posits a tripartite soul—the vegetative (generative), animal (conscious), and rational parts. The vegetative soul controls generation, nutrition and growth in living beings. The animal soul or the conscious soul has the function of sensation or sense perception. The rational soul has the faculty of reason and it is here that decisions are made.

Plato held that when people make a determination as to a course of action, they always act according to their understanding (or ignorance) of what

is good. No one would deliberately choose a bad course of action. Those who commit evil deeds do so out of ignorance and therefore, the wicked are slaves to ignorance. Because Plato held that men's acts are thus limited to that which they perceive as good, he could be deemed to be a determinist.

Eighteenth-century *philosophe* and physician, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, seizes upon Plato's three essential functions as the requisites for life and shows how they agree with the science of his century regarding the brain, nervous system, sensations, memory, imagination, and passions.<sup>6</sup> La Mettrie is a biological materialist—he holds that the world and man can be explained solely through the laws of physics, chemical molecules, the brain and nervous system. He is a hard determinist who denies the existence of the soul; when he uses the term “soul” [*âme*] in his writing, he employs it as a metaphor for the mind. Hence, La Mettrie exploits Plato's three systems of the soul to the hilt, all the while associating them with man's physiological structures only. He cleverly uses Plato, who did believe in the existence of the soul, as propaganda to further his own materialist agenda.

Plato was amazingly prescient in his acknowledgement of the three functions required for life by today's standards, too. Today's neuroscientists agree that the brain is comprised of a vegetative core that controls physical functions such as appetite, heartbeat and kidney functioning, an animal layer on top of that linked to emotions, passions and fears, and a rational layer on top of that containing the thinking and reasoning faculties.

While the ancients had philosophical disputes regarding the random underpinnings of human experience and the existence of the soul, modern thinkers who are hard determinists also address chance events and issues of the mind—not the collision of atoms, but the combination of DNA traits; recessive genes that come to the fore and become dominant; birth order in a family (i.e., whether one happens to be the oldest, middle or youngest child); the family, society and culture into which one happens to be born; issues relating to the neuroscience of the human brain. Today's hard determinists use heredity and environment to argue that there are antecedent causes for every action and that therefore, no action is free.

Examples of hard determinists are B.F. Skinner, who invented the Skinner Box and worked on behavior modification with pigeons; Sigmund Freud, who held that we are motivated by unconscious desires lurking in the subconscious mind; Ivan Pavlov, who conditioned dogs to salivate; the ethologist Konrad Lorenz; the sociobiologist Richard Dawkins. It is understandable that social scientists investigating learned behavior would naturally gravitate

towards hard determinism. Other examples of hard determinists include Isaac Newton, Jonathan Edwards, Anthony Collins, the materialists (Denis Diderot, Paul Henri Thiry d'Holbach, and Claude-Adrien Helvétius), Joseph Priestly, Pierre Simon Laplace, Clarence Darrow, Edward Bernays, John Hospers, Ted Honderich, John Watson, Galen Strawson, Derk Pereboom, Richard Double, Daniel M. Wegner, and Saul Smilansky.

Diderot was a materialist who, like La Mettrie, d'Holbach, and Helvétius, thought that all human activity is caused by the determinism of heredity and environment. *The Nun* chronicles the tragic consequences of forced monasticism and sequestration that prevents the absence of fresh input into the human psyche from society. Madame \*\*\* walks and behaves in an awkward, disjointed manner that may be a product of heredity or perhaps, a psychological response to her sheltered existence. *Rameau's Nephew* begins with a portrait of a man who is either schizophrenic or suffering from bipolar disorder. Diderot, patiently and methodically, like a diagnostic, records every detail of the symptoms of the person he is diagnosing and lets the reader decide whether the unfortunate victim is a product of nature, nurture, or perhaps a combination of both.<sup>7</sup>

However, despite his hard determinism, Diderot was an ardent moralist and eternal optimist and was able to reconcile determinism with activist politics: his life's work reiterates that it is up to the educated, legislators, and philosophers to champion and bring about free and universal public education. This will move society forward, expose people to new ideas, advance the arts and sciences, invigorate business, and with that, raise the standard of living for all. He also thought that the republican form of government was the best suited for the happiness of all. He petitioned Catherine of Russia to permit her nation to have a constitutional monarchy.

Diderot's *Observations on the Nakaz* (1774) opens with the famous declaration, "There is no true sovereign, except the nation; there is no true legislator, except the people."<sup>8</sup> Diderot makes it clear from the beginning of *Nakaz* that the only legitimate rule is that of the general will of the people. The statement is a reiteration of his article of 1751 entitled, "Political Authority," in which he affirmed, "The power which comes from the consent of the people necessarily presupposes conditions which makes its exercise legitimate, useful to society, advantageous to the republic, fixing and restraining it within limits. For a man neither should nor can submit himself entirely without reserve to another man..."<sup>9</sup>



The sovereignty of the people is repeated in the second paragraph of *Nakaz*. Take careful note of the stunning advice that Diderot gives to those who are currently forming a brand new system of government and are in the process of constructing a new constitution [code]: “The first line of a well-made Code should bind the sovereign. It should begin thus: ‘We the people...’”<sup>10</sup> This impassioned declaration bears a stunning resemblance to the preamble of the United States Constitution (1787), which would be penned thirteen years later: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union...promote the general Welfare...do ordain and establish this Constitution.” The *Nakaz* is surprisingly prescient precisely because it does embody the true spirit of the Enlightenment as articulated in the republican paragraphs of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and others. The framers of the United States Constitution could not do otherwise than to recognize the wisdom of and adhere to the principles articulated by the French *philosophes*.

Hence, Diderot reminds us that despite the determinism of heredity and environment, despite the fact that the poor and uneducated are at the mercy of their social status and have negligible free will, the powerful have the moral responsibility to ameliorate their society. To do otherwise—to ignore the plight of the suffering masses—is to abdicate one’s moral responsibility.

The issue of moral responsibility continues to be a topic of contention in modern times. When we dichotomize the problem of free will into two camps—those who aver that people are free to act as they wish and those who maintain that actions are determined by external events—the question of moral responsibility inevitably arises. Does moral responsibility for an action require that the person’s decision to act be freely made? Most thinkers agree that moral responsibility for an act exists only if the person is free to act as he does; he is not morally responsible if he was forced to commit the act or was unable to avoid doing it.

Let us take a look at how hard determinism can be successfully used by a defense attorney in a court of law to obviate moral responsibility. Such an example is seen in the famous 1924 hearing that involved the grisly murder of a 14-year-old boy.

On May 21, 1924 Nathan Leopold, 19, and Richard Loeb, 18, drove up alongside an acquaintance, Bobby Franks, 14, as he was walking home from school. Loeb invited Franks into the car and then stabbed him multiple times in the back of his head with a chisel as Leopold drove the vehicle away. Subsequently they hid Franks’ body in a drainage culvert and demanded \$10,000 ransom from his parents. The two were apprehended because Leo-

pold had dropped a pair of tortoise shell glasses with an unusual hinge that was traced back to a Chicago optometrist.

Famed attorney Clarence Darrow was hired and he strategized how to save the killers from the death penalty. First, he had them submit a guilty plea. He chose this approach for two reasons. First, the State of Illinois intended to try them twice—for murder and kidnapping, both of which carried the death penalty. By having them plead guilty, Darrow reduced the number of opportunities for capital punishment from two to one. Secondly, by pleading guilty, they would avoid having to face a jury—the public was angry and most people wanted to see the death penalty enforced. The guilty plea meant that they would have a hearing before one judge—in this case, Judge John R. Caverly—and Darrow would have the opportunity to prey on his conscience, as Caverly alone would decide whether the two teenagers would live or die.

Darrow succeeded in arguing determinism via heredity and environment. Douglas O. Linder summarizes Darrow's defense thus: "The defense presented extensive psychiatric evidence describing the defendants' emotional immaturity, obsessions with crime and Nietzschean philosophy, alcohol abuse, glandular abnormalities, and sexual longings and insecurities. Lay witnesses, classmates and associates of Loeb, were offered to prove his belligerence, inappropriate laughter, lack of judgment, and childishness. Other lay witnesses testified as to Leopold's egocentricity and argumentative nature."<sup>11</sup>

Darrow connected the dark nature of the teenagers' reading material with the effect that it had on their psyches. Linder advises, "...Loeb read mostly detective stories. He read about crime, he planned crimes, and he committed crimes, although none until 1924 were crimes involving physical harm to a person. (Darrow and Leopold later saw Loeb's fascination with crime as a form of rebellion against the well-meaning, but strict and controlling, governess who raised him.) For Loeb, crime became a sort of game; he wanted to commit the perfect crime just to prove that it could be done."<sup>12</sup> Leopold, on the other hand, voraciously devoured the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, author of *Beyond Good and Evil*: "Leopold agreed with Nietzsche's criticism of moral codes, and believed that legal obligations did not apply to those who approached 'the superman.'"<sup>13</sup>

Columnist Sam Roberts explains that Darrow had argued that "they were too young to be executed and that their moral compass had been distorted by the teachings of Nietzsche. 'It is hardly fair,' he maintained in his argument,

‘to hang a 19-year-old boy for the philosophy that was taught him at the university.’”<sup>14</sup>

Darrow’s efforts succeeded and Judge Caverly spared the two killers from the death penalty, opting for life imprisonment instead. Thus Clarence Darrow was victorious in persuading the judge that his young clients did not have free will, could not make their own decisions, had no options, and were powerless puppets whose strings were pulled by inherited nature, hormonal imbalances, a rebellious response against strict upbringing by governesses hired by wealthy parents, and the influence of books glorifying crime and questioning moral ethics that piqued their interest.

### Soft Determinism

While there are some thinkers who agree with the hard determinist point of view, there are others who would be quick to point out that there is a big difference between *causing* and *forcing* an action. We call these thinkers soft determinists. They hold that actions can be both caused and free: they concede that we can always look to a chain of events that precedes an action, but that does not necessarily mean that we are *compelled* to choose that action. Because they feel that free will is compatible with causation, they are said to be compatibilists. Michel de Montaigne, David Hume (see *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*); Baruch Spinoza, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, G.E. Moore, A.J. Ayer and Harry G. Frankfurt, embrace soft determinism.

Kapitan advises, “Its supporters include some who identify freedom with autonomy (the Stoics, Spinoza) and others who champion freedom of spontaneity (Hobbes, Locke, Hume). The latter speak of *liberty* as the power of doing or refraining from an action according to what one wills, so that by choosing otherwise one would have done otherwise. An agent fails to have liberty when constrained, that is, when either prevented from acting as one chooses or compelled to act in a manner contrary to what one wills.”<sup>15</sup> Methods of diminishing liberty include coercion and manipulation.<sup>16</sup>

Montaigne recognizes that humans are trapped within the confines of their culture. He discusses horrific practices in exotic lands such as cannibalism and the practice of dragging one’s father through the streets. He also notes that people find themselves entrapped by childhood habits that, once acquired, remain for the duration of one’s lifetime. However, he believes that it is possible to break out of these vicious cycles by 1) relying on reason and

not emotions when making decisions, 2) getting into the habit of doing things differently (i.e., travelling, eating new and different foods, making new friends), and education. Montaigne prides himself on maintaining his composure and objectivity in trying situations and advises his readers that the best way to maintain control of the will is by resolving to employ reason and logic and then by adhering to the resolution.

Spinoza also finds that determinism can coexist with free will, noting the importance of not letting one's emotions be based on external events. Nigel Warburton summarizes Spinoza's views thus: "He was a determinist. This meant that he believed that every human action was the result of earlier causes. A stone thrown into the air, if it could become conscious like a human being, would imagine that it was moving at its own willpower even though it wasn't. What was really moving it along was the force of the throw and the effects of gravity. The stone just felt that rather than gravity, it was controlling where it went. Human beings are the same: we imagine that we are choosing freely what we do and have control over our lives. But that's because we don't usually understand the ways in which our choices and actions have been brought about. In fact free will is an illusion. There is no spontaneous free action at all."<sup>17</sup>

However, Spinoza also held that determinism does not necessarily obviate free will and self-control. Warburton adds, "But although he was a determinist, Spinoza did believe that some kind of very limited human freedom was possible and desirable. The worst way to exist was to be in what he called bondage: at the complete mercy of your emotions. When something bad happens, someone is rude to you, for example, and you lose your temper and are filled with hatred, this is a very passive way to exist. You simply react to events. External happenings cause your anger. You are not in control at all. The way to escape this is to gain a better understanding of the causes that shape behavior—the things that lead you to be angry. For Spinoza, the best way that we can achieve this is for our emotions to emerge from our own choices rather than external events. Even though these choices can never be fully free, it is better to be active than passive."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, like Montaigne the century before, Spinoza sees reason and logic as the key to the preservation of free will and self-control during trying situations.

Rousseau agrees that while men are limited by heredity and varying degrees of physical strength and intellect, they do have free will—this holds true for both natural man and civilized man. Harold Bloom summarizes Rousseau's views thus: "There are two characteristics which distinguish man

from the other animals and take the place of rationality as the defining quality of humanity. The first is freedom of the will. Man is not a being determined by his instincts; he can choose, accept, and reject. He can defy nature. And the consciousness of this liberty is the evidence of the spirituality of his soul. He is aware of his own power. The second, and least questionable characteristic of man, is his perfectibility. Man is the only being which can gradually improve its faculties and pass this improvement on to the whole species. All the superior faculties of the mind seen in civilized man are proofs of this. They are now a permanent part of the species, but they did not belong to it naturally. On the basis of these two basic characteristics of man, it can be said that natural man is distinguished by having almost no nature at all, by being pure potentiality. There are no ends, only possibilities. This constitution leads him away from his original contentment toward the misery of civil life, but it also renders him capable of mastering himself and nature."<sup>19</sup>

Bloom advises that while natural man has free will, it is the determinism of the harsh conditions of forest living that force him to band together with others for the purpose of survival. Here we see a combination of free will (man gravitates toward the formation of societies because they are useful) and the determinism of geography and climate that force him to choose between life or death: "Natural man, then, is a lazy beast, enjoying the sentiment of his own existence, concerned with his preservation and pitying the sufferings of his fellow creatures, free and perfectible. His motion toward the civilized state is a result of unforeseeable accidents which leave unalterable marks on him. He is forced into closer contact with other men by natural catastrophes. He develops speech and begins to maintain a permanent establishment with his woman and children."<sup>20</sup>

Once man joins society, he finds that it is useful to surrender his free will to the general will in order to gain certain benefits, i.e., protection of his person, family, and property. By identifying with the general will, he feels that he has not really surrendered his freedom: the accomplishments of the group are viewed as his own. Bloom summarizes, "Man, free by nature, needs government to organize and regulate the life in common to which he has become committed. But precisely because he has developed terrible passions which necessitate government, a just government is rendered factually difficult because the men who form the laws are under the influence of those passions, and the citizens continue to possess those passions and have every interest in altering the government for the sake of their satisfaction";<sup>21</sup>

“Law is the product of the *general will*. Each individual participates in legislation, but the law is general, and the individual in his role as legislator must make laws which can conceivably be applied to all members of the community. He makes his will into law but now, as opposed to what he did in the state of nature, he must generalize his will. As legislator he can only will what all could will; as citizen he obeys what he himself willed as legislator.”<sup>22</sup>

Voltaire was another *philosophe* who, while acknowledging determinism, held that reason could triumph and improve the lot of humanity. Humans do have some free will and it is up to them to ameliorate their situation by eliminating superstition and fanaticism. Richard H. Popkin recapitulates Voltaire’s compatibilism thus: “Voltaire insisted that there is a natural basis for ethics and justice. If people examine legal and moral questions without prejudice, especially religious prejudice, and will employ reason, they will find natural human laws. These laws will allow for just decisions and just societies. The human condition can be improved to some degree. But Voltaire lacked the great optimism of Condorcet, and saw improvement and the achievement of human happiness severely limited because of so many uncontrollable natural and human factors. But he proposed specific ways in which the educational and judicial systems could be improved to better the human condition.”<sup>23</sup>

There are also modern scholars, i.e., Harry G. Frankfurt, who hold that determinism and freedom are compatible. However, today’s thinkers carefully weigh how much moral responsibility a person has if, say, he is forced to act a certain way. Frankfurt reflects on the relationship between determinist factors and free will and concludes that people can be held morally responsible for their actions, despite determinism. Kapitan summarizes Frankfurt’s thesis thus: “Others challenge the idea that responsibility requires alternative possibilities of action. The so-called *Frankfurt-style cases* (developed by Harry G. Frankfurt) are situations where an agent acts in accord with his desires and choices, but because of the presence of a counterfactual intervener—a mechanism that would have prevented the agent from doing any alternative action had he shown signs of acting differently—the agent could not have done otherwise. Frankfurt’s intuition is that the agent is responsible as he would have been if there were no intervener, and thus that responsible action does not require alternative possibilities.”<sup>24</sup>

In a landmark paper entitled, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” Frankfurt defines what he calls “the principle of alternate possibili-

ties” and then proceeds to refute it. This principle states that a person is morally responsible for his actions only if he could have done otherwise. Frankfurt declares that this principle is false and that the “principle’s plausibility is an illusion.”<sup>25</sup> He holds that a person may be held to be morally responsible for an act he has committed even though he could have done otherwise.

Frankfurt grants that there are times when the circumstances that bring about an action also make it impossible for a person to avoid doing it, i.e., coercion, hypnotic suggestion, or an inner compulsion.<sup>26</sup> However, there are also “circumstances that constitute sufficient conditions for a certain action to be performed by someone and that therefore make it impossible for the person to do otherwise, but that do not actually impel the person to act or in any way produce his action. A person may do something in circumstances that leave him no alternative to doing it, without these circumstances actually moving him or leading him to do it—without them playing any role, indeed, in bringing it about that he does what he does.”<sup>27</sup>

Frankfurt provides the example of an action performed by a Mr. Jones. Jones decides to commit an act; then someone threatens Jones with a penalty if he does not do it; then Jones performs the act. The question arises: is Jones morally responsible for his behavior? Frankfurt considers the possibilities. It may be that Jones—let us call him Jones<sub>1</sub>—did what he already decided to do and that therefore, the threat had no effect on him. Here Jones is morally responsible for his act. It should also be added that in this example, the threat neither coerced him, nor deprived him of alternative actions. Despite the threat, Jones<sub>1</sub> was still free to behave in an alternative manner.<sup>28</sup>

Another possibility is that Jones—let us say Jones<sub>2</sub>—was so overwhelmed with fear because of the threat, that he committed the act for that reason alone, even though he had previously decided to commit the act. Here he is not morally responsible for the act itself because he was coerced; he is morally responsible for his earlier decision, even though that decision played no role in his action.<sup>29</sup>

There is a third possibility. Let us say that Jones<sub>3</sub> made an earlier decision to commit the act, was later threatened, and he committed the act solely because he had already decided to do so, not because of the threat. He is morally responsible because his action was based on his own decision, not the threat. However, the question arises as to whether since he was threatened, he can still be held morally responsible. Frankfurt holds that the answer is yes: “Even though a person is subject to a coercive force that precludes his performing any action but one, he may nonetheless bear full

moral responsibility for performing that action”;<sup>30</sup> “His knowledge that he stands to suffer an intolerable harsh penalty does not mean that Jones<sub>3</sub>, strictly speaking, *cannot* perform any action but the one he does perform. After all it is still open to him, and this is crucial, to defy the threat if he wishes to do so and to accept the penalty his action would bring down upon him...Jones<sub>3</sub>’s inability to resist the threat does not mean that he cannot do otherwise than perform the action he performs”;<sup>31</sup> “This, then, is why the principle of alternate possibilities is mistaken. It asserts that a person bears no moral responsibility—that is, he is to be excused—for having performed an action if there were circumstances that made it impossible for him to avoid performing it. But there may be circumstances that make it impossible for a person to avoid performing some action without those circumstances in any way bringing it about that he performs that action...For those circumstances, by hypothesis, actually had nothing to do with his having done what he did. He would have done precisely the same thing, and he would have been led or made in precisely the same way to do it, even if they had not prevailed.”<sup>32</sup>

Frankfurt concludes that “the principle of alternative possibilities should be revised so as to assert that a person is not morally responsible for what he has done if he did it because he could not have done otherwise.”<sup>33</sup> Because of this definition, “he will not be morally responsible for what he has done if he did it only because he could not have done otherwise, even if what he did was something he really wanted to do.”<sup>34</sup>

The issue of moral responsibility will be more heavily debated in future courts of law as developments in neuroscience and genetics reveal physiological reasons that men act as they do and defense attorneys argue that their clients could not have done otherwise.

## Libertarianism

The third category entailed by the problem of free will is indeterminism or libertarianism. Indeterminists hold that not all events are caused, as per the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, for example. While mechanical causality may be true of inanimate objects, it does not apply to human beings, who are conscious and can think. The indeterminist defends his school of thought by arguing: 1) I can do X, 2) I want to do X, and 3) I can do something other than X.<sup>35</sup> With humans, more often than not (unless they are being held captive behind enemy lines), all three conditions are met, and so, determinism is



false. Jean-Paul Sartre held that at every moment, we are free to choose how we will be (see *Being and Nothingness*). Immanuel Kant was also an indeterminist who held that humans act because of *reasons*, not *causes*. Moreover, determinism does not address the perspective of the person. Humans can reflect on their situation and on morality. Therefore, they have the power to choose how they will behave. Other examples of indeterminists are John Duns Scotus, C.A. Campbell, Roderick Chisholm, Richard Taylor, John Thorp, Michael Zimmerman, Richard Swinburne, Godfrey Vesey, Alan Donagan, William Rowe, Robert Kane, David Widerker, Carl Ginet, Randolph Clarke, and Timothy O'Connor.

Sandra Lafave explains the indeterminist position thus:

When I think about how to behave, I consider *reasons*. I never think about causes, because insofar as I am an agent, they are never relevant. I have to make choices, and I choose on the basis of reasons. In other words, the model of physical causation does not fit at all when you try to apply it to human choices. Even if all human choices *were* determined, the HD model would still be completely inadequate to describe the perspective of the agent, which is what really matters for morality. The HD position is simply at odds with human experience because it continually asserts that as far as human experience is concerned, things are not what they seem. (What seems voluntary really isn't, for example.)

The indeterminist says you will find that there is undoubtedly a freedom to make or withhold moral effort, which exists no matter what a person's past conditioning has been.

Consider the following example: Take two people A and B. Suppose A has had a wonderful childhood—loving, supportive parents, no worries about money, good health, etc. Suppose B has had a terrible childhood—his parents didn't want him, beat him up, never enough money, etc. Suppose now that A and B are grown up. They have a mutual friend Z, who goes on vacation, and leaves a key to his apartment with A, and another key with B. Z has a watch that A and B both like very much; it occurs to both of them to steal it. Stealing it would be simple under the circumstances. Given their respective conditionings, what can we say about the relative strength of the temptation to steal the watch in A and in B? Probably, the temptation will be stronger for B. Another way of saying this is that the amount of moral effort required by B to resist the temptation will be greater than the amount required by A...both A and B have to *decide* whether to expend the amount of moral effort required to resist the temptation. Both have to choose, and neither one's conditioning determines how they will choose. This choice is a free choice. Conditioning does not determine how they will choose—it *determines only the degree of difficulty* of different moral tasks for different people. Either A or B can choose either way.

So when we say that some people are at a disadvantage because of their conditioning, we mean that choosing rightly will be harder for them, but not impossible. More moral effort will be required by a person with unfortunate conditioning; however, we always suppose that a person is responsible for the amount of moral effort

he puts forth, no matter what his conditioning. Perhaps it is more likely that b will not put forth the effort; but A can slip too. Thus, by looking at actual cases of decision-making, the indeterminist says that freedom to make or withhold effort (moral effort, or other kinds of discipline, e.g., saving money, physical training) is clearly not illusory, and the existence of responsibility for choice can't be denied. Effort of the will is an illusion only if you deny your own experience.<sup>36</sup>

In this study we will take a journey through the corridors of time to examine the evolution of thought regarding free will. Because of discoveries in neuroscience in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, philosophers, ethicists, sociologists, and neurobiologists today have come to understand that a redefinition of free will is needed as well as how we think about it. For example, neuroethicist Martha Farah, Director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Cognitive Neuroscience, suggests that the focus should be on rationality, not free will, so that we can address moral and legal responsibility for our actions.<sup>37</sup> A criminal's ability to be rational will be argued more and more by defense lawyers in the years ahead and neuroscience advances in leaps and bounds and identifies the relationship between behavior and brain activity. Discoveries in the lab will also be applied to disciplines as diverse as ethics, psychology, and sociology.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century advances in psychology have made it possible for public relations executives such as Edward Bernays to determine how to transform the purchasing public into hordes of compulsive shoppers. This is effected by causing the subconscious mind to associate inanimate objects (i.e., cigarettes and sleek automobiles) with unconscious desires. Hence, cigarettes in the hands of women are associated with androgyny and male power; sports cars, driven by men, also symbolize power and dominance.

By the end of the book we will have considered issues challenging both the will of the individual and the general will. We will have been reminded of the vision of a republic held by the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, which was the foundation of many constitutions since the eighteenth century. We will observe the tension between private interest and that of the individual/general will. Montesquieu advised what happens when men have ceased to love virtue above all else. The baron de La Brède calls out to us across the centuries, warning, "when virtue is banished, ambition invades the mind of those who are disposed to receive it, and avarice possesses the whole community. The objects of their desires are changed; what they were fond of before has become indifferent; they were free while under the restraint of laws, but they would fain now be free to act against law..." (*Spirit of Laws*,

3.3).<sup>38</sup> When virtue flees, the passions and private interest fill the void—men act out of greed and respond only to fear; men cease to obey the law and that is the end of the republic.

# Chapter One

## The Bible

*Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*

—Rev 3:20

The notion that man has free will is a basic premise of Judaism. The Old Testament is liberally sprinkled with terms that connote volition and choice; an examination of all of them would lead one to conclude that free will is emblazoned across every page of the Old Testament. Let us examine the recurrence of terms that can be translated as “free will” and “choose.”

James Strong’s *Concordance* indicates that the English word “freewill” occurs 17 times in the King James Version of the OT.<sup>1</sup> Of these occurrences, the original Hebrew *ned-aw-baw’* is used 15x; *ned-ab’* (Aramaic), 2x. Strong advises that *ned-aw-baw’* (which comes from *naw-dab’*) is defined thus: “...prop. (abstr.) *spontaneity*, or (adj.) *spontaneous*; also (concr.) a *spontaneous* or (by infer., in plur.) *abundant gift*.”<sup>2</sup> When we count the number of times that *ned-aw-baw’* occurs in the OT, we find that it appears 35x. Strong advises that the KJV translates it as “freewill offering (15x), offerings (9x), free offering (2x), freely (2x), willing offering (1x), voluntary offering (1x), plentiful (1x), voluntarily (1x), voluntary (1x), willing (1x), willingly (1x).”<sup>3</sup> Strong points out that “This offering is always given willingly, bountifully, liberally, or as a prince would offer. It refers not to the nature of the offering or the external mode in which it is offered, but to the motive and spirit of the offerer.”<sup>4</sup>

Let us examine two more words that connote free will. One is *naw-dab’*. Strong defines it thus: “...a prim. root; to *impel*; hence to *volunteer* (as a soldier), to *present* spontaneously.”<sup>5</sup> It appears 17x in the OT and Strong

avers that the KJV translates it as “offered willingly (6x), willingly offered (5x), willing (2x), offered (1x), willing (1x), offered freely (1x), give willingly (1x).”<sup>6</sup>

Another word is *ned-ab'* (Aramaic). Strong states that it corresponds to *naw-dab'* and defines it thus: “*be* (or *give*) *liberal* (-ly).”<sup>7</sup> It is used 5x in the OT: “freely offered (1x), freewill offering (1x), offering willingly (1x), minded of their own free will (1x).”<sup>8</sup>

When Hebrew Scriptures mention free will, they use it as an adjective to modify offering (s) to God. Strong indicates that *ned-aw-baw'* is used to articulate that the Jews made free will offerings to God in the following verses: “vows, and for all his freewill offerings” (Lev 22:18); “or a freewill offering in beeves or” (Lev 22:21); “thou offer for a freewill offering” (Lev 22:23); “and beside all your freewill offerings” (Lev 23:38); “of in a freewill offering, or in your” (Num 15:3); “your freewill offerings, for your burnt” (Num 29:39); “vows, and all your freewill offerings, and the” (Deut 12:6); “nor thy freewill offerings, or heave” (Deut 12:17); “of a freewill offering of thy hand” (Deut 16:10); “even a freewill offering, according as” (Deut 23:23); “was over the freewill offerings of God” (2 Chr 31:14); “beside the freewill offering for the” (Ezr 1:4); “a freewill offering unto the LORD” (Ezr 3:5); “the gold are a freewill offering unto” (Ezr 8:28); “the freewill offerings of my mouth, O” (Ps 119:108).<sup>9</sup> *Ned-ab'* is used to show that the Jews exercised their free will in these two verses: “their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem” (Ezr 7:13); “with the freewill offering of the people” (Ezr 7:16).<sup>10</sup>

Related to “freewill” is “freely” and this English word occurs 17x in the KJV—7x in the OT and 10x in the NT. Examples of “freely” in the OT, using *ned-aw-baw'* include “I will freely sacrifice unto thee” (Ps 54:6); “backsliding, I will love them freely (Hos 14:4).”<sup>11</sup>

Another word that frequently recurs in the OT is *baw-khar'* and it is used to signify that a choice is to be made. The KJV translates *baw-khar'* as “choose” 77x; “chosen,” 77x; “choice,” 6x, choose...out (5x); acceptable (1x); appoint (1x); excellent (1x); chosen men (1x).<sup>12</sup> Hebrew words that connote choice include *baw-khar'*; *baw-khoor'*; *baw-raw'*; *baw-rar'*; *mib-khawr'*; *kaw-bal'*.<sup>13</sup> “Choose” occurs 59x in the KJV of the OT; “chooseth,” 2x; “chooseth,” 3x; “chose,” 24x; “chosen,” 194x.

Let us examine some verses in which men are exhorted to choose from among various alternatives. Scholars point out that the entire biblical teaching on reward and punishment is contingent upon the notion that man is free to choose whether to do good or evil. This basic premise is clearly articulated

in Deut 30:15–19. In these verses God instructs His people, “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it...I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live” (Deut 30:15–16, 19). “Choose” in the exhortation “choose life” is the English translation of the Hebrew *baw-khar*, meaning “to try,” implying “to select” or “to choose.”<sup>14</sup>

The 30<sup>th</sup> chapter of Deuteronomy is a call from God to make a conscious, deliberate choice between monotheism and paganism. This choice will have consequences and will result in either life or death. In Deut 30:17–18 and 20 several verbs are employed that indicate that people have free will: “But if thine heart turn away”; “so that thou will not hear”; “But shalt be drawn away”; “and worship other gods”; “and serve them”; “therefore choose life”; “that thou mayest love the LORD thy God”; “that thou mayest obey his voice”; “that thou mayest cleave unto him.” Here the listener is called upon to choose *not* to turn his heart away, avoid hearing, be drawn away, or worship or serve idols. Rather he is implored to choose life, love God, obey His voice, and cleave unto him. Not only is volition implied, but it is hyperbolized by the significance of the outcome—life or death.

*Baw-khar*’ first appears in the Bible in Gen 6:2: “That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” Here the sons of God are free to choose whom they will marry. Another example where *baw-khar*’ refers to man’s free will choice is “Lot chose [for himself] all the plain of Jordan...” (Gen 13:11).<sup>15</sup>

However, Strong points out that although *baw-khar*’ often refers to human choice, sometimes it signifies God’s choice: “(3) In more than half of the occurrences, God is the subject of *bachar*, as in Num 16:5: ‘...The Lord will show who are his, and who is holy;...even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him.’ (4) Neh 9:7–8 describes God’s ‘choosing’ (election) of persons as far back as Abram: Thou art the LORD the God, who didst chose Abram...’ (5) *Baw-khar*’ is used 30 times in Deuteronomy, all but twice referring to God’s ‘choice’ of Israel or something in Israel’s life...(6) Being chosen by God brings people into an intimate relationship with Him...”<sup>16</sup>

Just as God calls upon the Jews to make a decision and choose life in Deut 30:11–20, he does so once more in Josh 24:15: “...choose you this day whom ye shall serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” Here the people are called upon to choose; Joshua and his family have already made the decision to remain faithful to God’s divine calling.

Two more Hebrew words that connote volition are *yawd* and *zade*, which the KJV translates as “presumptuously.” *Yawd* is used in the following verse and the *King James Study Bible* points out that here, humans willfully rebel against God: “But the soul that doeth aught presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people” (Num 15:30). The *King James Study Bible* advises that in Num 15:30 “*Presumptuously* literally means ‘with a high hand,’ such as a raised or clenched fist in defiance of God and His commands. This seems to be illustrated in verses 32–36 by the gathering of sticks on the Sabbath. Note Hebrews 10:26–31, referring to Deuteronomy 17:2–6; cf. Mark 3:29; 1 John 1:7; 5:16.”<sup>17</sup>

Strong assigns number 3027 to “presumptuously” in Num 15:30, referring to *yawd*: “a prim. word; a *hand* (the *open* one [indicating *power, means, direction, etc.*], in distinction from 3709, the *closed* one...”<sup>18</sup> Strong advises that “presumptuous” occurs 2x in the OT and “presumptuously,” 6x. These eight verses suggest that when humans engage in various actions, they do so of their own free will. For example, “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression” (Ps 19:13). The *King James Study Bible* advises that here, “The man of faith can only respond with a prayer that he be kept from both hidden sins (v. 12) and willful sins (v. 13).”<sup>19</sup> Strong assigns number 2086 to “presumptuous”: “...*zade*”; from 2102; *arrogant*:—presumptuous (1x), proud (13x).”<sup>20</sup> Number 2102 is “*zood*; or (by perm.) *zeed*; a prim. root; to *seethe*; fig. to be *insolent*:—deal proudly (4x), presumptuously (3x), presume (1x), be proud (1x)...”<sup>21</sup>

Other instances in which the KJV translates a Hebrew word as “presumptuous” or “presumptuously” are “But if a man come presumptuous upon his” (Ex 21:14); “LORD, and went presumptuously up into the hill” (Deut 1:43); “and the man that will do presumptuously” (Deut 17:12); “hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously” (Deut 17:13); “but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously” (Deut 18:22).