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## THE MAIN PROBLEM WITH USC LIBERTARIANISM

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**ABSTRACT.** Libertarians like Robert Kane believe that indeterminism is necessary for free will. They think this in part because they hold both (1) that my being the ultimate cause of at least part of myself is necessary for free will and (2) that indeterminism is necessary for this “ultimate self-causation”. But seductive and intuitive as this “USC Libertarianism” may sound, it is untenable. In the end, no metaphysically coherent (not to mention empirically valid) conception of ultimate self-causation is available. So the basic intuition motivating the USC Libertarian is ultimately impossible to fulfill.

### I.

Most objections to libertarianism focus on indeterminism. They suggest either (a) that indeterminism doesn't contribute any more to free will than does determinism or (b) that indeterminism is incompatible with free will. In this paper, I shall argue that the fundamental problem with at least one version of libertarianism – what I shall refer to as “ultimate self-causation libertarianism” or “USC libertarianism” for short – is not indeterminism. Instead, it is the impossibility of ultimate self-causation.

### II.

By definition, incompatibilists believe that

(1) free will and determinism are incompatible<sup>1</sup>

and conclude from this that

(2) free will entails indeterminism.

Why might incompatibilists subscribe to (1)? I think that there are two main motivations for subscribing to (1).<sup>2</sup> Some incompati-



bilists are motivated by the “Power to Do Otherwise Argument” (or “PDO Argument”):

- (3) Determinism is incompatible with the power to do otherwise
- (4) Free will entails the power to do otherwise.
- (1) ∴ free will and determinism are incompatible.<sup>3</sup>

Other incompatibilists are motivated by the “Ultimate Self-Causation Argument” (or “USC Argument”):<sup>4,5</sup>

- (5) Determinism is incompatible with “ultimate self-causation” (i.e., my being the ultimate cause of particular choices).
- (6) Free will entails ultimate self-causation.<sup>6</sup>
- (1) ∴ free will and determinism are incompatible.

Where do incompatibilists go from here? What do they conclude from (1)? Some incompatibilists – the hard determinists – hold:

- (7) Even though free will entails indeterminism, free will and indeterminism are still incompatible. Free will and indeterminism are just as incompatible as free will and determinism.

From (1) and (7) and the assumption that

- (8) determinism and indeterminism are logically exhaustive,

hard determinists conclude:

- (9) Free will is simply impossible.<sup>7</sup>

Other incompatibilists – the libertarians – *reject* (7). Instead, they hold the opposite of (7):

- (10) Free will and indeterminism are compatible.

From (2), (10) and either (4) or (6), then, it follows that if indeterminism and either the power to do otherwise or ultimate self-causation is possible,

- (11) free will is possible.

My arguments against libertarianism (in sections IX through XII) shall focus primarily on libertarianism arrived at through the USC Argument. I shall refer to this version of libertarianism as “USC libertarianism” and to its proponents as “USC libertarians”. My central question shall be whether or not ultimate self-causation in

the sense necessary for USC libertarianism to work is even possible. I shall argue that it is not.<sup>8</sup>

### III.

Consider first the principal conflict between hard determinists and libertarians – namely, the conflict between

(7) Free will and indeterminism are incompatible

and

(10) Free will and indeterminism are compatible.

Since most compatibilists join ranks with hard determinists on this issue, I shall refer to those who endorse (7) collectively as “anti-libertarians”.

There are actually two different arguments anti-libertarians make for (7) and against (10). The first anti-libertarian argument suggests that if a given choice is undetermined, then it is not self-determined or (therefore) in my control. And self-determination is necessary for, indeed constitutive of, free will.<sup>9,10</sup>

The second anti-libertarian argument suggests that if a given choice is undetermined, then it is not determined by a reason. If it is not reason-determined, then it is simply “random”, “spontaneous”, “capricious”, “arbitrary”, “irrational”. And free choice, by definition, is not random, spontaneous, etc.<sup>11</sup>

From both anti-libertarian arguments, anti-libertarians conclude that

(7) free will and indeterminism are incompatible.

But what implications this conclusion has for free will depends on which anti-libertarians we are talking to. As I mentioned above, hard determinists generally conclude that indeterminism contributes no more to free will than does determinism. Instead, both are equally incompatible with free will. Therefore (9). Compatibilists generally conclude that the incompatibility of free will and indeterminism plus (11) establishes that determinism is not only compatible with but necessary for free will.<sup>12</sup>

## IV.

One way in which the generic libertarian might respond to the first anti-libertarian argument above is simply by clarifying her position. The libertarian is not suggesting that a completely undetermined choice is free. Of course, self-determinism is necessary for free will. Rather, she is suggesting that self-determinism is not incompatible with indeterminism, that there are ways to combine them.

As far as I can see, there are two such ways. According to the first way,

- (12) I make a particular choice – say to X – *and* I am not determined by anything else to choose as I do (i.e., to choose to X)<sup>13</sup>

So it's not that I make an entirely undetermined choice. Instead, *I* choose to X. But my choosing to X is entirely undetermined. Nothing else causes or influences me to choose to X.

According to the second way,

- (13) I choose to X, and my choosing to X is motivated by a reason or set of reasons – call whichever it is “R”.<sup>14</sup>

*and* either

- (14) I am not determined to have R

or

- (15) R does not determine but underdetermines my choice to X.<sup>15</sup>

If (15) is the case, then I am “influenced” by R to choose to X. In Leibniz’s terms, I am “inclined” but not “necessitated” by R to choose as I do. Again, R (in conjunction with the state of everything else) *underdetermines* my choice. There is a “gap of underdetermination” between my having R and my choosing to X. Given R and the very same set of psychological, bodily, external, and nomological circumstances, I might *not* have chosen to X.<sup>16</sup>

## V.

Let’s turn our attention for a moment back to the USC Argument in section II. Again, the USC Argument holds that

(6) free will entails ultimate self-causation.

But why do some libertarians – namely, USC libertarians – accept (6)? That is, why do USC libertarians think that free will entails ultimate self-causation?

I think that USC libertarians are motivated to subscribe to (6) by the following argument – call it the “Argument for (6)”:

- (16) I am responsible for a given choice only if I am responsible for the immediate cause (call it “IC1”) or a part of the immediate cause (including the motivation, if any, or part of the motivation; call it “IC1<sub>p</sub>”) of this choice. Conversely, if I am not responsible for any part of the immediate cause of my choice, then I am not responsible for my choice.
- (17) I am responsible for IC1 or IC1<sub>p</sub> only if I am responsible for the cause (IC2) or part of the cause (IC2<sub>p</sub>) of IC1 or IC1<sub>p</sub>.
- (18) I am responsible for IC2 or IC2<sub>p</sub> only if I am responsible for the cause (IC3) or part of the cause (IC3<sub>p</sub>) of IC2 or IC2<sub>p</sub>.
- (19) And so on.
- (20) I can’t be responsible for an infinite regress of causes or parts of causes.
- (21) ∴ if I am responsible for my choice, then my choice must have an ultimate cause – i.e., a point at which this causal chain begins – and either I am this ultimate cause or I am part of this ultimate cause. I must initiate or help to initiate the causal chain leading up to my choice without being determined by a cause for which I am not responsible to initiate the causal chain as I do.

## VI.

So if free will is to be possible for USC libertarians, it must be the case that ultimate self-causation (as described in (21)) is possible.

(12) certainly seems to constitute one kind or instance of ultimate self-causation. In it, I am the ultimate source or cause of my choice to X. I initiate the chain leading up to my choice to X without anything determining me to initiate the chain as I do.

But what about

- (14) I am not determined to have R, and

(15) R underdetermines my choice to X?

Do these constitute or satisfy ultimate self-causation?

Not necessarily. It is certainly possible for both (14) and (15) to be satisfied without my being the ultimate cause of my choice to X. (14), for example, is satisfied even if R just indeterministically “pops” into my head. Yet if R indeterministically pops into my head, its becoming a part of my psychological state is not at all self-caused. It is entirely uncaused.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, (15) is satisfied if R indeterministically causes me to choose to X. But if this were the case, then I would not be the ultimate cause of my choice to X. R-plus-chance would be. In other words, given R-plus-chance, I am not the cause of which way my will tilts. If my will tilts toward acting on R, this is not my doing. Likewise, if my will tilts away from acting on R, this is not my doing either.<sup>18,19</sup>

So we need to supplement (14) and (15) with two different conditions. If (15) is the case *and* my choice to X is ultimately self-caused, then we need to add:

(22) R underdetermines my choice to X and I fill in the gap of underdetermination between R and my choice without being determined to fill it as I do. That is, I choose to act on R without being fully determined by R (or anything else) to choose as I do.

If (14) is the case *and* my choice to X is ultimately self-caused, then we need to add the following disjunction:

(23a) I choose to give myself or acquire R without being determined by anything else – including another reason – to choose to acquire R, or

(23b) My choice to acquire R is motivated by yet another reason – call it “R1”.

While (23a) amounts to ultimate self-causation, (23b) doesn’t necessarily amount to ultimate self-causation. Instead, it splits into a disjunction similar to the disjunction (13) led to (i.e., (14) and (15)). That is, (23b) splits into either

(23b1) I am not determined to have R1, or

(23b2) R1 underdetermines my choice to acquire R, I fill in the gap of underdetermination between my having R1 and my

acquiring R by choosing to acquire R, and I am not determined to fill in this gap of underdetermination as I do (i.e., I am not determined to choose to acquire R).

(23b2) clearly amounts to ultimate self-causation. But (23b1), like (14), does not necessarily amount to ultimate self-causation. For, once again, R1 could have just spontaneously popped into my head.

So it seems that we must now treat (23b1) like (14) and split it into yet another disjunction (like (23a) and (23b)). But if we do so, we will only end up with two more disjuncts like (14) and (15). Yes, we will get different causal chains. But we will not get different *kinds* of causal chains or different *kinds* of ultimate self-causation. We will inevitably just get the same kinds of disjunctions, a disjunction first of the (14)/(15) kind, then (from the (14)-kind-of-disjunct) a disjunction of the (23a)/(23b) kind, then (from the (23b)-kind-of-disjunct) a disjunction of the (14)/(15) kind once again, and so on. So, for the sake of simplicity, I propose that we nip this regress in the bud by eliminating (23b1) and simply splitting (14) into (23a) and (23b2).

If we do this, then we end up with the following four kinds of ultimate self-causation:

- (12) I choose to X and I am not determined by anything else – including a reason like R – to choose as I do;
- (22) R underdetermines my choice to X, and I fill in the gap of underdetermination between R and my choice without being determined to fill it as I do. That is, I choose to act on R without being fully determined by R (or anything else) to choose as I do;
- (23a) I choose to give myself or acquire R without being determined by anything else – including another reason like R1 – to choose to acquire R;

and

- (23b2) R1 underdetermines my choice to acquire R, I fill in the gap of underdetermination between my having R1 and my acquiring R (by choosing to acquire R), and I am not determined to fill in this gap of underdetermination as I do (i.e., I am not determined to choose to acquire R).<sup>20</sup>

## VII.

We may gather from sections V and VI that for USC libertarians, anything less than ultimate self-causation is either incompatible with free will (determinism) or insufficient for free will (indeterminism without self-determinism).

But this brings us to a new problem for the USC libertarian. It's not clear that any of the four options above – i.e., (12), (22), (23a), or (23b2) – qualifies as *real* ultimate self-causation, at least not the kind of ultimate self-causation necessary for responsibility on USC libertarianism. It seems that by the tenets of USC libertarianism, in order to be responsible for my choice to X, I would have to be not merely the end of the line – i.e., the beginning of or first cause in the causal chain behind my choice. I would also have to be the ultimate cause of the end of the line itself. That is, I would also have to be the ultimate cause of myself – the self that chooses (to X and/or to acquire R). Otherwise, I am not really responsible for this first link in the chain. Rather, whatever is the ultimate cause of this choice-making self is responsible for this first link. And if I am not responsible for this first link, then I am not responsible for whatever follows this first link. Rather, whatever is responsible for this first link is responsible for whatever follows this first link.<sup>21</sup>

The USC libertarian might argue at this point that free will does *not* require me to be the ultimate cause of myself. Rather, free will requires only that my non-ultimately-self-caused-self constitute the “undetermined initiator” of my choices. As long as I initiate the causal chain leading up to my choice without being determined to initiate this causal chain as I do, I am responsible for my choice. I need not also initiate any causal chain ultimately leading up to or terminating in my – the undetermined initiator's – existence or nature (or that particular part of my nature that initiates the causal chain leading up to my choice).

But it's not clear that the USC libertarian is entitled to this position. Undetermined initiation doesn't seem to secure the agent any more freedom or control than does determinism. Once we see why the USC libertarian thinks that free will entails ultimate self-causation, we also see why undetermined initiation is insufficient for free will. We saw above that the reason free will requires me to be the ultimate cause of my choices derives largely from



- (16) I am responsible for a given choice only if I am responsible for the immediate cause or a part of the immediate cause (including the motivation, if any, or part of the motivation) of this choice.

Suppose that I am the ultimate cause of my choice to X. For example, I choose to do something Y that directly or indirectly results in my choosing to X.<sup>22</sup> By (16), I must be responsible for the immediate cause of my choosing to Y. But the immediate cause of my choosing to Y is *me*. Therefore I must be responsible for me. And just as we found that my being responsible for a given choice means that I must be the ultimate cause or part of the ultimate cause of this choice, my being responsible for myself means that I must be the ultimate cause or part of the ultimate cause of myself.

I conclude from this, then, that if we subscribe to the USC libertarian's own principles (namely, the Argument for (6) in section V above),

- (24) free will entails that I am the ultimate cause of myself.

Since (24) is the logical extension of the USC libertarian's own principles, the USC libertarian is committed to (24) whether or not she realizes it or cares to admit it.

## VIII.

The USC libertarian who doesn't shrink from my conclusion in the last section might explain (24) in the following way. What (24) suggests is that I do not enter the deliberative process with a predetermined psychological state that itself determines the nature and outcome of this deliberative process. Yes, I do have various desires, values, emotions, etc. at work. But they don't have precise relative strengths. Rather, their relative strengths are still indeterminate. I enter the deliberative process with an indeterminate mixture of psychological properties. My reasons for acting either way don't come with predetermined weights. Rather, I will determine what weights they have in the course of deliberating among them. In the course of deliberating over what I shall do, I will in effect assign the relative strengths to these competing forces without being deter-

mined to assign the strengths I do by any part of my psychological state that already has determinate strength.<sup>23</sup>

So not only is it the case that I determine the relative strengths of these competing forces. It is also the case that in the very act of assigning these relative strengths, I determine the nature of myself. The I that does the determining is itself to some extent indeterminate. It is filling itself in, where the it that is doing this filling in is itself not yet filled in. Put another way, the different reasons that go into the various assignments are themselves indeterminate, have indeterminate strengths. And in the course of “knocking against” each other, these indeterminate reasons – or reasons of indeterminate strengths – work toward making each other more determinate, toward giving each other determinate relative strengths.

One way to think about this is by analogy with a sculptor. When I engage in this deliberative process, it is not merely as if I am “chiseling away” at my “psychological rock” but rather as if the psychological rock is chiseling away at itself. And how it chisels away is not itself fully determined by the nature of the psychological rock itself. The very part of the psychological rock that is chiselling away chisels away at itself. The very process of chiselling away determines its own nature, chisels away at its own chiselling. So the ultimate source of the finished product is a set of indeterminate forces, forces that are struggling to give themselves determinate shape.<sup>24</sup>

In this way, I am the ultimate cause of my nature or at least part of my nature. Through my deliberative process, I work to flesh out a part of myself – a part of my psychological sculpture – that up to this point remained indeterminate. An indeterminate part of me works to make itself more determinate without this work being determined by anything but itself.<sup>25</sup>

#### IX.

(24), however, can be interpreted in one of two ways: either

(24a) I am the ultimate cause of the *existence* of myself

or

(24b) I am the ultimate cause of the *nature* of myself, my *psychological* nature, or at least a *part* of my nature.

While (12) and (22) require (24a), (23a) and (23b2) require (24b).

It would be foolish for the USC libertarian to adopt (24a) and therefore (12) or (22). For (24a) is clearly impossible. I simply cannot be the ultimate cause of myself qua “bare agent” in the world. To see this, consider the following *reductio*. Suppose I brought myself into being at time  $t_0$ . Then I would still have to have existed prior to  $t_0$ . For if I brought myself into the world, then I would be the efficient cause of myself. And except in cases of backward causation (the possibility of which is suspect), the efficient cause generally precedes the effect in time. But if I existed prior to  $t_0$ , then I didn’t bring myself into being at  $t_0$  in the first place. Instead, I existed prior to  $t_0$ .<sup>26</sup> Of course, it might be argued that I previously brought this “me at  $t_0-1$ ” – i.e., the self that brought myself into being at  $t_0$  – into being as well. But then the me at  $t_0-1$  who created this me at  $t_0$  must itself have been brought into existence by yet a previous me – a me at  $t_0-2$ . And this clearly leads straight toward an infinite regress of self-caused me’s. So (24a) entails that prior to  $T_0$ , I brought myself into existence from eternity.

It seems, then, either that ultimate self-causation in the (24a)-sense above is simply metaphysically *impossible* or that it is metaphysically possible for divine or superhuman beings in a way that we cannot possibly comprehend. Whichever is the case, however, the “Infinite-Regress Argument” above successfully proves that ultimate self-causation in the (24a)-sense is indeed metaphysically impossible for finite (human) beings like me. Given this argument, I clearly am not and cannot be the ultimate cause of the existence of myself. My existence is and must ultimately be the result of forces beyond my control (namely, my conception, the fact that nothing yet has killed me, and whatever is ultimately responsible for these two positive and negative causes).<sup>27,28</sup>

But what about (24b)? What about my (psychological) nature? Can I be the ultimate cause of my nature or at least part of my nature – e.g., a value or desire or personality trait? We have already seen the two ways in which I might be the ultimate cause of a reason (like R): (23a) and (23b2). Again, if (23a) is the case, then I choose to acquire R without being determined by anything else to make

this choice. And if (23b2) is the case, then R1 underdetermines my choice to acquire R, I fill in this gap of underdetermination, and I am not determined to fill in this gap of underdetermination as I do. And what applies to R, of course, can apply to all kinds of psychological properties/states – values, desires, personality traits. So it seems that I can be the ultimate cause of at least part of my nature – whether it be a reason, value, desire, or personality trait.

#### X.

If we stopped at this point, it would seem as though ultimate self-causation and therefore USC libertarianism is a workable theory, that ultimate self-causation of at least parts of my psychological nature is possible. But in this and the next two sections, I shall argue that it is not.

The main problem with (23a) is one that we have already encountered – namely, the second anti-libertarian argument in section III above. Since my choosing R is entirely undetermined, since it is not influenced or motivated by any reason, it is random. And it seems to be a necessary condition of free will that my choice be non-random (reason-motivated). Even libertarians like Kane seem to accept this argument. (Notice, it also applies to (12).)<sup>29</sup>

So we turn to (23b2). In this section, I shall first offer one standard objection to this proposal and then offer what I take to be the strongest libertarian response. In section XI, I shall offer what I take to be the principal problem with (23b2).

The first objection that may be raised against (23b2) is as follows. It isn't clear how indeterminism in (23b2) (i.e., my not being determined to fill in the gap of underdetermination between R1 and R as I do) contributes any more to my responsibility for myself than would be contributed if I were *determined* to fill in this gap of underdetermination as I do. For to the extent that my choice to acquire R is undetermined, it is not self-determined.<sup>30</sup> And to the extent that it is not self-determined, it is not in my control. It is rather (to this extent) in the control of something else – namely, chance. So it seems that this element of indeterminism doesn't contribute to but rather diminishes my control over my choice to acquire R.

Perhaps the strongest response the libertarian can give to this objection is this. Of course, if my choice to acquire R is *fully* or *mostly* undetermined, then it is fully or mostly out of my control. But *just a bit* of indeterminism gives me more control over my choice than I would have if there were *no* indeterminism. For this small element of indeterminism is enough to render my choice undetermined and thereby enable me to escape the chains of determinism. But it is not so great that I become mostly or entirely irrelevant to my choice. In short, if the element of indeterminism is sufficiently small, I remain sufficiently relevant to my choice without *having* to make this choice. So I have complete or near-complete control over my choice, at least more control than I would have if my choice were either determined or mostly or entirely *undetermined*. This is what enables me to take control over myself and therefore over my subsequent choices.

## XI.

In this section, I shall present the second objection – my own objection – to (23b2) and USC libertarianism more generally. I shall argue that one USC libertarian condition of free will – namely, (21) (the conclusion of the Argument for (6)) – renders it impossible for me ever to take control over any reason or choice.

Consider two different situations, Situation 1 and Situation 2. In Situation 1, I indeterministically give myself R at time T<sub>0</sub>. In Situation 2, another agent – call him “External Agent” – indeterministically gives me R at time T<sub>0</sub>. Suppose further that in both situations, R goes on to motivate me to choose in a certain way – say to X – at a later time. Finally, suppose that in both situations my self prior to acquiring R is not at all self-determined. At no previous time have I determined my nature in any way. I am either entirely undetermined, entirely determined by forces outside myself, or a combination of both.

The USC libertarian wants to argue that I am responsible for my choosing to X only in Situation 1 and not in Situation 2. For my choosing to X in Situation 1 was determined by a part of my nature that is ultimately self-caused, namely R. But my choosing to X in Situation 2 was *not* determined by a part of my nature that is ulti-

mately self-caused. Rather, in Situation 2, R is entirely *other*-caused, not *self*-caused (no less *ultimately* self-caused).

But I argue that this position is untenable. Clearly, I am not at all responsible for External Agent in Situation 2. For I have no control over External Agent. I have not at all determined his nature or his implanting R in me. But the USC libertarian overlooks something that is crucial. She overlooks the fact that the same is true of me in Situation 1. I belong in the same category as External Agent. Ex hypothesi, up to the point before which I chose to acquire R, I was entirely un-self-determined. Therefore I was just as un-responsible for me, the self that chose to give myself R. So when it comes to responsibility, I – the self that chooses R – am in the very same boat as External Agent. Both are equally outside my control. The self that motivates me to choose as I do is just as out of my control as is External Agent.

By the Argument for (6) in section V, then, it follows that I have no responsibility for my choice to acquire R in Situation 1. It is just as outside my control as my acquiring R in Situation 2. Since I have just as little control over myself as over External Agent, I have just as little control over my choice to acquire R as I do over External Agent's choice to give me R. I have equally negligible control over the choice-determining agent in both situations and therefore equally negligible control over the choice this agent makes.

By (21), then, there is no responsibility-relevant difference between Situation 1 and Situation 2. From (21) and the fact that I in Situation 1 am just as out of my control as is External Agent in Situation 2, it follows that I am just as un-responsible for any choice I make in Situation 1 as I am for any choice ultimately motivated by External Agent.

In the end, what applies to me in Situation 1 applies to me in *all* situations. The ultimate cause of any part of my psychological nature is whatever is the ultimate cause of the self with which I started out. But the ultimate cause of the self with which I started out just isn't and can't be me. The empirical, if not necessary, fact is that I start out with a self that is non-self-determined.<sup>31</sup> And this seemingly innocuous fact shatters any hope the USC libertarian may have that I am or can be the ultimate cause of any part of my nature.

As long as I start out with a non-self-determined self, I *never* can be the ultimate cause of myself. For at whichever point I try to become the ultimate cause of myself, the act of attempting to become the ultimate cause of myself will itself be determined by a self that didn't ultimately determine itself.

## XII.

Notice, it won't help to say that I underdetermine my choice in Situation 1. For it clearly doesn't contribute to my control over my acquiring R in Situation 2 to say that it was underdetermined by External Agent. And, again, I am in the same boat as External Agent. I have just as little control over the I as over the External Agent. So it equally doesn't contribute to my control over my choice to acquire R to say that this choice was underdetermined by me.

The USC libertarian might argue at this point that this argument fails if my pre-R-choosing self *had* been self-determined. If, for example, I am motivated to choose R by R1 *and* I had previously (indeterministically) chosen R1 in a (23b2)-type way, then the self that chooses R *is* – unlike External Agent – in my control. Therefore I can still have control over my choice of R and therefore over whatever choices R proceeds to motivate.

But the very same problem that initially applied to R (namely, that it was determined by an un-self-determined self and therefore not in my control) will apply instead to R1. Or if R1 was itself chosen on the basis of a self-determined reason – R2 – then it will apply to R2. Or if not to R2, then to R3. At some point, it will apply. And this will then have control-negating repercussions from this reason forward. It will negate control over this (first) self-given reason and therefore control over every subsequent choice this self-given reason immediately or ultimately motivates – including all of my subsequent reason-choices as well.<sup>32</sup>

Again, the USC libertarian might argue that the regress of self-determined reasons never ends, that it goes infinitely backward. So there is never a reason to which the argument above has to apply. But this is a weak position, as weak as the position that there was or must have been an infinite regress of self-caused selves prior to my conception (see section IX above). An infinite regress of

self-determined selves/reasons is at best impossible to fulfill and at worst metaphysically nonsensical. Again, the empirical, if not necessary, fact is that I must ultimately start out with an un-self-determined self. And again, by the Argument for (6) in section V above, this fact renders my taking control of myself at some later point metaphysically impossible.

Finally, the USC libertarian will want to say that we must simply end the regress with an undetermined choice that emanates from a non-self-determined self. There must be a *first time* at which I took control of myself. So up to a certain time in my life, I was fully non-self-determined. But at some point, I just *took* control of myself by giving myself a reason – R – that I was not determined to give myself. So while I had no control over myself and therefore over my reason-choice, I am now self-determined in a way that I wasn't before making this choice to acquire R. Therefore I now have control over myself – at least control over R – and therefore over whatever choices I make as a result of R in a way that no previous stage of myself – no stage of myself prior to choosing R – had control over its choices.

It certainly seems right to say that if I ever have any control over my choices, then there must be a point at which I begin to take control (or gradually to take control) over my choices. But my point is that the USC libertarian is not entitled to this position. For this position entails that I can have control over certain choices even though I am not the ultimate cause of these choices. And this violates a principle to which the USC libertarian is committed – namely, (21).

### XIII.

Given my anti-libertarian arguments in sections XI and XII, it looks like the USC libertarian has only one of two ways to respond. Her first option is to continue to maintain that

(6) free will entails ultimate self-causation.

If she sticks with (6), however, then she may no longer maintain that free will is possible. She must join the ranks of the hard determinists. For sections XI and XII together show that ultimate self-causation of the kind that the USC libertarian wants is simply impossible.



Her second option is to give up (6). But if she wants to remain a libertarian, no less an incompatibilist, she must then subscribe to the PDO Argument. And there are serious problems with this argument as well. I will not, however, go into them here.<sup>33</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For the remainder of this paper, I shall use “free will” to mean control, autonomy, responsibility. I realize that these terms are not necessarily synonymous and may, in some cases, come apart. But the kind of situations in which they might come apart are irrelevant to this particular discussion. So my lumping these concepts together shouldn’t raise any problems for my discussion.

<sup>2</sup> So does Kane (1996a, 32ff.).

<sup>3</sup> This is a highly condensed and overly simplistic version of van Inwagen’s Consequence Argument (1975; 1983, 16, Ch. III). See also Lamb (1977) and Ginet (1966, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Chisholm (1964, 1966), Kane (1985, 1989, 1994, 1996a, 1996b), Reid (1969), Taylor (1963, 1966).

<sup>5</sup> Of course, some incompatibilists may be motivated by *both* arguments.

<sup>6</sup> (6) may actually motivate (3) and (4) for some incompatibilists. It may motivate, that is, their belief that free will entails the power to do otherwise in the incompatibilist sense. I say “may” here because (6) is only one of several possible motivations behind (3) and (4).

<sup>7</sup> See Smart (1961); G. Strawson (1989, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> So I am in the same camp as: Berofsky (1987), Broad (1952), Dennett (1984), Double (1991), Hobbes (1962), Klein (1990), Strawson (1986), Waller (1990), Wolf (1990).

<sup>9</sup> See Bonjour (1976, 147–153). Van Inwagen (1983, 129–134) offers and then rejects a similar argument. The argument he offers and then rejects suggests that an undetermined action can’t be free because it isn’t an action in the first place. For being an action entails being determined. So an undetermined action is conceptually incoherent. By contrast, the first anti-libertarian argument above suggests that while undetermined actions are conceptually possible, they can’t be free.

<sup>10</sup> This kind of argument leads Smart (1961) to conclude that libertarianism is self-contradictory. Libertarians, Smart argues, want choices to be both determined (self-determined) and undetermined. But these are mutually exclusive.

<sup>11</sup> See Double (1988).

<sup>12</sup> See R.E. Hobart (1934); Nowell-Smith (1948, 46–47).

<sup>13</sup> (12) is one kind of “immanent” or “agent” causation.

<sup>14</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I shall assume from this point forward that there is only one reason – one belief-desire combination – motivating my choice. But I am perfectly aware that I could have multiple reasons both motivating and conflicting with any choice I make. Moreover, R is supposed to take in every part of my

psychological state – all of the beliefs, values, desires, personality traits, emotions, etc. – that is causally or motivationally relevant to my choice.

<sup>15</sup> The different models represented by (14) and (15) are characterized very clearly by van Inwagen (1983, 126 ff.).

<sup>16</sup> I have in mind here what Kane (1996a) refers to as “moral” and “prudential” choices. Both kinds of choices involve some sort of “inner conflict”, a “conflicted will”.

<sup>17</sup> Ginet (1989) seems to think that even though my choice is not ultimately self-caused in this situation, it is still free. But then Ginet must explain why he thinks that indeterminism is necessary (and possibly sufficient) for free will. For, as I have said, one of the main motivations for this position seems to be the USC Argument. And if Ginet holds the position above, then the USC Argument is clearly not his motivation for subscribing to incompatibilism.

<sup>18</sup> It’s not even clear that it would be correct to call this my choice or a choice at all if only R and chance, not I, were not part of its immediate cause.

<sup>19</sup> Van Inwagen (1983, 149) ultimately rejects this last argument (regarding (15)). But he does not offer a positive argument against it. Rather, he simply asserts that rejecting this argument is the least unpalatable of several unpalatable options. Rejecting this argument is merely “puzzling”. Rejecting the other options is “inconceivable”.

<sup>20</sup> For van Inwagen (1983, 144 ff.), agent/immanent causation (the “first model of causation”) is equivalent to (12) or (22), although he suggests on p. 152 that it is equivalent strictly to (22). He also equates the “second model of causation” – what I have been referring to as “underdetermination” and what he sometimes refers to as causal “production”, which he contrasts with causal necessitation – with (15) alone or (22)-minus-ultimate-self-causation.

<sup>21</sup> Notice, I am not assuming that my being the ultimate cause of my action entails that I be the ultimate cause of myself. I am not assuming that a given cause C can’t be the ultimate cause of a given effect E only if C is self-caused. Rather, what I am suggesting is that while C can very well be the ultimate cause of E even if C is not self-caused, it can’t be *responsible* for E according to USC libertarianism unless it is *both* the ultimate cause of E *and* self-caused.

<sup>22</sup> It directly results in my choosing to X if Y and X are equivalent. It indirectly results in my choosing to X if Y and X are distinct.

<sup>23</sup> See Nozick (1981), Ch. 4.

<sup>24</sup> The same kind of analogy motivates the title of Dennett’s book, *Elbow Room* (1984).

<sup>25</sup> Edwards (1967) contrasts “libertarians” and “determinists” as follows. While determinists think that the strongest motive determines my choice, and my choice then determines my action, libertarians think that my choice determines my strongest motive (in cases of conflicting motives), and my strongest motive then determines my action. The argument in this section, then, is clearly libertarian in Edwards’ sense.

<sup>26</sup> Suppose that before I was born, God let me choose what kind of person I would become. He simply placed before me millions of possible selves, let me select the

self I liked the best, and engineered my DNA (and environmental conditions) accordingly. Even in this farfetched situation, it would be false to say that I am the ultimate cause of myself. For I was not the ultimate cause of my pre-birth self, the self that chose to be this kind of person, in the first place.

<sup>27</sup> See Hobart (1934).

<sup>28</sup> Of course, I may be partly responsible for the fact that forces outside my control have not yet killed me. I may have deliberately avoided possible threats to my life and thereby saved it. But the fact that I have avoided possible threats to my life is probably much more a matter of luck. I am simply lucky that no life-threatening disease has afflicted me, that there is no war going on around me, that I have not been in a severe car or plane accident, that I grew up in a relatively safe neighborhood, etc.

<sup>29</sup> Kane (1988, 1989, 1994, 1996a (Ch. 7 and 8), 1996b) attempts to get around the second anti-libertarian argument by arguing that undetermined does not necessarily mean random. Suppose that prior to making a particular choice, I am faced with two options – X-ing and Y-ing. Suppose also that I have or develop reasons for choosing either way. Kane argues that no matter which way I choose, my choice isn't random. And this is so even if my choice is not entirely determined by the events that precede it. Even if the entire history of the world, my psychological state, physical state, and local circumstances together underdetermine my choice, it is still non-random. For whichever way I choose, I have a reason for choosing that way. My choice is still reason-motivated. It has not just "one-way" but "two-way" or "plural" rationality. See also Bonjour (1976, 154–155).

<sup>30</sup> What do I mean by the extent to which my choice is undetermined? How indeterministic my choice is depends on in what percentage of nomologically equivalent possible worlds with histories identical to that of the actual world up to the point of choosing I would make the same choice. Suppose that in 41 of every 100 nomologically equivalent possible worlds with a history identical to that of the actual world up to the point of choosing, I choose to X. In the other remaining 59 possible worlds, I choose to Y. Then there was a 41% chance that I would choose to X and a 59% chance that I would choose to Y. Put another way, if the actual world were to be wound back 100 times to the exact same state that actually obtained at the point prior to choosing, I would choose to X 41 and would choose to Y 59 times.

<sup>31</sup> I am not suggesting that I necessarily exist, only that necessarily if I exist, my initial existence and nature is non-self-determined.

<sup>32</sup> See van Inwagen (1983, 146).

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