

Descartes on Spontaneity, Indifference, and Alternatives

In his writings on free will, Descartes notes three distinct, though possibly related, kinds of freedom. Two of them are mentioned in the 9 February 1645 letter to Mesland. Alluding to a passage from Meditation 4, discussed in detail below, Descartes writes:

I would like you to notice that “indifference” in this context seems to me strictly to mean that state of the will when it is not impelled one way rather than another by any perception of truth or goodness. This is the sense which I took it when I said that the lowest degree of freedom is that by which we determine ourselves to things to which we are indifferent. But perhaps others mean by “indifference” a positive faculty of determining oneself to one or other of two contraries, that is to say, to pursue or avoid, to affirm or deny. I do not deny that the will has this positive faculty. (CSMK 245)

Indifference in the first sense — which I hereafter call simply “indifference” — is not, according to Descartes, essential to free will. However, indifference in the second sense — “a positive faculty” or power — is essential. I refer to the second, positive sense of indifference as “alternatives” since it is related to the more contemporary notion of *alternative possibilities*. Roughly speaking, a person has alternatives if and only if he is both able to perform some action and able to perform some contrary action.

The third kind of freedom discussed by Descartes is termed “spontaneity,” and in several passages (CSM I, 296; CSM II, 40, 41; CSMK 234) he suggests that it, too, is essential to free will. Vere Chappell writes that “an action is spontaneous if it is performed by its agent entirely on his own, without being forced or helped or affected

by an external factor, or by anything other than his very self."¹ Given what has been said so far, Descartes's theory of free will can be summarized as follows: alternatives and spontaneity are necessary for free will but indifference is not.

Philosophers have found fault with this theory, or even with the suggestion that Descartes endorses it, for two distinct kinds of reasons. First, some think that the view is *internally* problematic since an inconsistency, or at least a "logical tension," emerges when Descartes's assertions about free will are taken collectively. More specifically; commentators have made three related claims: (1) that the requirements of alternatives and spontaneity "appear to yield two different conceptions of freedom";² (2) that alternatives are essentially connected with indifference, so that Descartes cannot accept the former yet deny the latter as being necessary for free will;³ and (3) that in certain passages (CSMK 246; AT VII, 57–58) Descartes even denies that alternatives are essential to free will.⁴

Second, there is the allegation that the above theory is *externally* inconsistent, that it conflicts with other claims held by Descartes. There is, for instance, his acceptance of what John Cottingham calls "the doctrine of the irresistibility of the natural light," or INL. According to INL, "When the intellect is confronted with a clear and distinct perception, the will is immediately and spontaneously compelled to give its assent to the truth of the relevant proposition."⁵ The problem here is aptly expressed by Robert Inlay: "How can reasons be evidentially compelling and still leave us with genuinely open alternatives?"⁶ There are similar criticisms, too, involving Descartes's assertions about God's foreknowledge or preordination, but I won't discuss them in this chapter since I think that what I do say applies to these cases as well.⁷

As the internalist criticisms suggest, the issue here is not simply the tenability of Descartes's theory but the proper identification of it. On the one hand, there are those, like myself, who think that Descartes holds a *two-way compatibilism*: he believes that free will is compatible with determinism, yet he also thinks that it requires alternatives, a *two-way power* "to pursue or avoid, to affirm or deny."⁸ On the other hand, there are those who think that he adopts a *one-way compatibilism*. According to this view, Descartes either never really endorsed the requirement of alternatives or he later came to reject it, so he explains freedom in terms of spontaneity alone.⁹ What's especially interesting is that nearly everyone who thinks that Descartes is a two-way compatibilist also believes that at least one of the above criticisms ultimately proves to be devastating to his account of free will. In general, then, either philosophers find Descartes's theory to be seriously flawed or they think that it is quite different from the *prima facie* sketch I provided in the opening paragraphs.

In this chapter, I argue in favor of the two-way compatibilist reading of Descartes. Not only do I think that this is the best way to understand him but also I believe that some form of two-way compatibilism is true. Thus, although Descartes's thoughts on the subject are no doubt abstruse, I think that he offers important insights about the nature of human freedom. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first two, I define some preliminary notions and explain Descartes's two-way compatibilism in detail, providing textual support for my interpretation along the way. In the third section, I present and respond to the three internal problems noted above and explain,

but then reject, the one-way compatibilist reading of Descartes. I believe that the charge of external inconsistency is related to the traditional problem of free will and determinism. In the space provided I cannot solve this problem, but in the final section I intend to show why Descartes's two-way compatibilism offers as good of a solution as we are likely, even at this time, to get.

Descartes on Free Will: Some Preliminaries

According to the free will thesis, or FT, persons, at least sometimes, have free will.¹⁰ Though much about Descartes's theory is debatable, it is beyond question that he endorses FT. In fact, he takes the radical view that "the will is by its nature so free that it cannot be constrained" (CSM I, 343). In the 25 December 1639 letter to Mersenne he writes that "God has given us a will which has no limits" (CSMK 141), and he makes similar remarks throughout his writings (CSM II, 39, 40, 42; CSM I, 204, 205). Descartes even goes so far as to say that although our will differs in important respects from the one that God possesses (CSMK 179; CSM II, 40, 291–292; CSM I, 203), in the "essential and strict sense" we are as free as God is (CSM II, 40; CSM I, 384). In the 1639 letter to Mersenne he adds: "It is principally because of this infinite will within us that we can say we are created in [God's] image" (CSMK 141–142).

That we have unlimited freedom is, for Descartes, a "primary notion" (CSMK 161), which is "innate" (CSM I, 205–206) and known by the "natural light" (CSM II, 134). Elsewhere Descartes claims that we know we have freedom by an "inner experience," "awareness," or "consciousness" (CSM II, 39, 40, 134, 259; CSM I, 194, 234, 314; CSMK 277, 296, 342). I take it that in making this last point Descartes is embracing a thesis, held by some twentieth-century philosophers, to the effect that our freedom can be established by introspection, by reflecting on our own inner states.¹¹ It is worth noting that the above comments are made throughout Descartes's writings on free will, from earlier letters (1639) to the *Passions of the Soul* (1649).

For Descartes, free will is a faculty that is designated by a variety of equivalent terms: "the faculty of assent," "the faculty of will," and "the faculty of choice or freedom of the will" (CSM I, 207; CSM II, 41, 39). Thus, according to Descartes, there is no difference between "the will" and "free will." Both designate the same faculty, most clearly noted as the faculty of choice. In *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*, Descartes writes that "the term 'faculty' denotes nothing but a potentiality" (CSM I, 305). The potentialities relevant to the will I call "powers" or, synonymously, "abilities" or "capacities." A power is a potentiality in the sense that one might have it even if one does not use it.

Some may think that Descartes's definition is a bit of an understatement, for traditionally a faculty is thought of as "a collection of interrelated powers."¹² Others claim that calling the will a "faculty" suggests that there is a mysterious thing—the will—that has a certain property—being free.¹³ But if we regard a collection as nothing over and above the things that make it up, then faculties are nothing more than their composite powers. Additionally, we cannot always distinguish between a collec-

tion of powers and a single power. We may speak, for instance, of the power of turning on the light (which I have in contrast to a chair) even though this is made up of other powers (e.g., the power to move my finger), which are at least interrelated enough to include the power of turning on the light. Hence, faculties need be no more mysterious than the sense we get from Descartes's definition. At least this is how I use the term: a *faculty* is merely a *power*; the faculty of *free will*, specifically, is the power to choose, allowing that it might also be a collection of other component powers.

As I see it, if one has the power—the potential—to choose something that one did not choose, then it must have been the case that one could have made another choice or, more simply, that one could have chosen otherwise. Thus, inasmuch as the will involves a power related to choice, someone who has free will also has the power of choosing otherwise. We could just as easily substitute "action" here for "choice" since, according to Descartes and myself at least, a choice is a kind of action (CSM II, 39ff., 270). Hence, having free will includes having alternatives; that is, anyone who ever had free will could have, in some relevant sense, chosen or done otherwise. This is an adequate way of understanding the concept, for generally we say that one is free to the extent that one can do other things. Free will is freedom in its pure form, so one has free will to the extent that one can do *at least one other thing* than what one happens to do.

The history of philosophy is nearly univocal in accepting that free will requires alternatives, as this quote from G. E. Moore might attest.

The statement that we have Free Will is certainly ordinarily understood to imply that we really sometimes have the power of acting differently from the way in which we actually do act; and hence, if anybody tells us that we have Free Will, while at the same time he means to deny that we ever have such a power, he is simply misleading us. We certainly have *not* got Free Will, in the ordinary sense of the word, if we never really *could*, in any sense at all, have done anything else than what we did do.¹⁴

Though it is somewhat contentious, I claim that Descartes agrees with the above sentiment since alternatives turn out to be indifference in the positive sense, the one essential to free will. I discuss this point in more detail in the next section.

According to my interpretation, Descartes is a *compatibilist*; that is, he believes that FT is compatible with the thesis of determinism. Many confuse compatibilism with soft determinism but the two theories are not synonymous, as David Lewis nicely explains:

Soft determinism is the doctrine that sometimes one freely does what one is predetermined to do; and that in such a case one is able to act otherwise though past history and the laws of nature determine that one will not act otherwise.

Compatibilism is the doctrine that soft determinism may be true. A compatibilist might well doubt soft determinism because he doubts on physical grounds that we are ever predetermined to act as we do, or perhaps because he doubts on psychoanalytic grounds that we ever act freely. I myself am a compatibilist but no determinist.¹⁵

I do not claim that Descartes is a soft determinist. The suggestion is only that he thinks that one need not reject determinism in order to save free will, that he pre-

sents a theory of free will that is consistent with determinism or, in other words, that he is a compatibilist.

Certainly, Descartes never explicitly endorses the theory of determinism as we understand it today, but the same can be said for most other philosophers of his era. He does accept some related theses, such as the doctrines of divine foreknowledge, preordination, and grace. In fact, Descartes even believes that God is "the total cause of everything" (CSMK 272), which seems to entail that determinism is true.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Descartes believes that each of these claims is consistent with FT (CSM II, 40, 134, 292; CSM I, 206, 380; CSMK 234, 277, 282). Thankfully, showing any connection between the above views and determinism is unnecessary since, as I explained above, Descartes need not be a determinist to be a compatibilist.

Compatibilism has long been the subject of controversy because, as some have argued, determinism entails that the world could not have been any different than the way that it is—that nothing could be otherwise—which would rule out our having any genuine alternatives and, thus, free will. *Determinism* claims that the past, together with the laws of nature, entails a single, unique future. The view that the world could not have been otherwise—that every true proposition is necessarily true—is called *necessitarianism*.¹⁷ Thus, incompatibilists are usually motivated by the belief that determinism entails a kind of necessitarianism. Here is the *argument for incompatibilism*, which supports this view: "Given determinism, any future event is the consequence of the laws of nature and remote past events. But the laws of nature and remote past events are both necessary, in some sense. Therefore, all events—future as well as past—are necessary, in that same sense."¹⁸ The laws of nature and remote past events—like the events that occurred prior to the existence of human beings—are necessary in the sense that "no one has (or ever had) any choice about whether" they are true.¹⁹ According to the above argument, determinism spreads this necessity across all events, and, it seems, no one could ever do otherwise. Though it has received ample criticism, the argument still presents a challenge to any compatibilist theory.²⁰

Important for my purposes is Descartes's assertion that FT is compatible with INL, which I noted above. This thesis is essential to the project of the *Meditations*, where Descartes must arrive at propositions that he is *unable*, in some sense, to doubt.²¹ In Meditation 4, Descartes writes: "During these past few days I have been asking whether anything in the world exists, and I have realized that from the very fact of my raising this question it follows quite evidently that I exist. *I could not but judge* that something which I understood so clearly was true" (CSM II, 41; my emphasis). Strictly speaking, INL is much weaker than determinism since it is a doctrine that governs only beliefs and these only during times of clear and distinct perception. Still, INL entails a *local* determinism, in which, in at least some instances, our beliefs are necessitated in the same sense that all events are necessitated according to (global) determinism: holding *everything* fixed—the laws of nature and past events, including the particular reasons under consideration when a choice is made—the event could not have been otherwise. In such instances, our beliefs seem to be "compelled" by reason, and it is here where Descartes's assertions of our unlimited freedom become difficult to defend.

Nevertheless, Descartes is unwavering in his belief that there is no conflict be-

tween INL and FT. For not only are we free when our perceptions are clear and distinct but also we are "at our freest" when a "clear perception impels us to pursue some object" (CSM II, 292; see also CSM II, 40, 106; CSMK 245, 342). What is problematic, then, about Descartes's theory is that he believes that we have free will even when reason *compels* our beliefs and actions. The oddity of this view is brought out best by Descartes's own words: "The will of a thinking thing is drawn voluntarily and freely (for this is the essence of will), but nevertheless inevitably, towards a clearly known good" (CSM II, 117). How can something inevitable be, at the same time, free? This is precisely what I shall try to explain.

Descartes's Two-way Compatibilism

I begin with a well-known quotation from Meditation 4. The sentences are numbered for easy reference.

(1) The will simply consists in our ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); (2) or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we do not feel we are determined by any external force. (3) In order to be free, there is no need for me to be inclined both ways; (4) on the contrary, the more I incline in one direction—either because I clearly understand that reasons of truth and goodness point that way, or because of a divinely produced disposition of my inmost thoughts—the freer is my choice. (5) Neither divine grace nor natural knowledge ever diminishes freedom; on the contrary, they increase and strengthen it. (6) But the indifference I feel when there is no reason pushing me in one direction rather than another is the lowest grade of freedom; it is evidence not of any perfection of freedom, but rather of a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation. (7) For if I always saw clearly what was true and good, I should never have to deliberate about the right judgement or choice; in that case, although I should be wholly free, it would be impossible for me ever to be in a state of indifference. (CSM II, 40)

To a notable extent, unraveling Descartes's theory of free will requires nothing more than clarifying what is being said in this quotation, but that does not make the task any easier.

All of the kinds of freedom noted in the beginning of this essay are mentioned in this quotation. In passages (4)–(7), for instance, Descartes denies that mere indifference is essential to free will. He writes, in the 1645 letter to Mesland, that indifference is "that state of the will when it is not impelled one way rather than another by any perception of truth or goodness" (CSMK 244–245; see also CSM II, 40). In *Conversation with Burman* he adds that one "is more indifferent the fewer reasons he knows which impel him to choose one side rather than another" (CSMK 233). Thus I am indifferent to the extent that I lack reasons either in favor or against some choice. I might be indifferent either because I lack reasons altogether or because my reasons for alternative choices are of equal weight, as in the case of Buridan's ass as it sits between two equally appealing piles of hay.

What exactly, one may ask, is the connection between indifference and free will,

according to those who disagree with Descartes? No one suggests that indifference is *sufficient* for free will. In at least one telling of the Buridan story the ass is indifferent yet still lacks the ability to make a choice, which is why it starves to death. The requirement of indifference, though, seems to ensure that one is not a slave to reason, that one can choose in spite of—or even, perhaps, against—the dictates of reason. As such, the requirement is in conflict with Descartes's acceptance of INL. In situations in which one's choices are based on clear and distinct perceptions, there is no indifference, according to Descartes.

This is precisely why Descartes must deny that indifference is necessary for free will, as indicated by his comments in (4)–(7). Thus, at (6) he regards indifference as "the lowest grade of freedom" and says that it is "a defect in knowledge or a kind of negation." And at (7) he claims that it is possible that "I should be wholly free" even if it is "impossible for me ever to be in a state of indifference," which suggests that one could have free will without indifference. Moreover, there are his comments in the *Sixth Replies*, where he unequivocally states that "indifference does not belong to the essence of human freedom" (CSM II, 292). Note that Descartes does not reject indifference altogether; he only claims that it is not a *necessary condition* for freedom of will. All of these observations are in accordance with comments made at (4) and (5) as well.

The meaning of (2), I think, is also clear. Descartes implies that in order to have free will there cannot be any immediate external causes of our choices. Now, what he actually says is that free will "consists simply in the fact that" when we make choices "our inclinations are such that we *do not feel* we are determined by any external force." Perhaps all that is required for free will is that we *not feel* an external force, not that such forces be absent. But if we couple this passage with Descartes's view that our freedom is known by an inner awareness, the stronger thesis follows. In other words, Descartes thinks that we can tell by introspection that we are free, so if "we do not feel we are determined by an external force" it would follow for him that we are *not determined* by such a force. As I noted earlier, this position is held by some contemporary philosophers as well.²² I think that the view is incorrect, but I am merely noting that (2) suggests something stronger than it might at first seem to suggest, namely, that spontaneity is essential to free will.

Spontaneity is important to both *libertarians*—incompatibilists who endorse FT²³—and compatibilists, and it is easy to see why. Neither indifference nor alternatives are, on their own, sufficient for free will, even if they are necessary. Think, for instance, of Buridan's ass. To have free will, the ass would need the ability to make a choice while in the state of indifference. Thus, it is believed by some that if indifference were combined with spontaneity, free will might be achieved. Likewise, alternatives are not sufficient for free will either since a person has alternatives even if his or her choices or actions are purely random. If we couple alternatives with spontaneity, however, concerns about the agent's lack of freedom might be dissuaded. This is why most philosophers regard spontaneity as essential to any freedom worth having. Not surprisingly, Descartes also links spontaneity with alternatives, as I show shortly.

There is a difference between most compatibilist theories of spontaneity and libertarian ones. Given determinism, the causal chains leading to our actions eventually trace back to events that occurred prior to our birth. According to incompati-

bilists, since we have no control over these events, we have no control over our actions. Thus, libertarians, like those who endorse the “agency theory,”²⁴ usually require that agents be the “sole and unique cause” of their actions. Most compatibilists, on the other hand, are content with saying that we are mere *adequate* causes of our actions, though not *original* ones.²⁵

Passages (1) and (3) of the previous quotation are less congenial than the others. I offer two interpretations: my own, which I present here, and Michelle Beyssade’s, discussed in the next section. I think (1) suggests that alternatives are essential to free will. Passage (3), on the other hand, merely repeats the claim made in passage (6): that indifference, in the *first* sense, is not essential to free will. It is repeated twice, I think, to ensure that one does not confuse alternatives with mere indifference. The significance of “or rather,” at the beginning of (2), emphasizes that Descartes believes spontaneity and alternatives to be essentially linked, which is why he states — at (1) and (2) — that free will “consists” in each.

This last point is worth discussing in more detail. Consider, for instance, the following quotes from Descartes:

You admit . . . that we can guard against error. Now this would be quite impossible unless the will had the freedom to direct itself, without the determination of the intellect, towards one side or the other. (*Fifth Replies*, written in 1641; CSM II, 260)

That there is freedom in our will, and that we have power in many cases to give or withhold our assent at will, is so evident that it must be counted among the first and most common notions that are innate in us. (*Principles* 1:39, published in 1644; CSM I, 205–206)

But perhaps others mean by “indifference” a positive faculty of determining oneself to one or other of two contraries, that is to say, to pursue or avoid, to affirm or deny. I do not deny that the will has this positive faculty. (Letter to Mesland, written 9 February 1645; CSMK 245)

Each of these passages can be used to support the claim that Descartes regards spontaneity as essential to free will. But in each it is difficult to miss the references to a two-way power: “towards one side or the other”; “to give or withhold our assent”; “to one or other of two contraries.” Shortly after the second quote, at *Principles* 1:41, Descartes even refers to this power as a kind of “indifference”: “Nonetheless, we have such close awareness of the freedom and *indifference* which is in us, that there is nothing we can grasp more evidently or more perfectly” (CSM I, 206; my emphasis).

In the context of this discussion, it might do well to repeat the first two passages from the *Meditations* quotation:

The will simply consists in our ability to do or not do something (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid); or rather, it consists simply in the fact that when the intellect puts something forward for affirmation or denial or for pursuit or avoidance, our inclinations are such that we do not feel we are determined by any external force. (CSM II, 40)

On both sides of the “or rather” are references to a two-way power. I suggest that according to Descartes, alternatives and spontaneity make up a single power—the

power to determine oneself to either of two alternatives—which he identifies with free will. It follows that he thinks the individual powers that make up free will—alternatives and spontaneity—are both necessary for it and that he accepts a two-way compatibilism.

Internal Criticisms of Descartes’s Two-way Compatibilism

In this section I consider the three internal criticisms mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. I start with the contention that, in at least two passages, Descartes explicitly denies that alternatives are necessary for free will. Given this, it makes it implausible to think of Descartes as a two-way compatibilist, which renders the one-way compatibilist reading more probable. The first passage is claimed, by Beyssade, to be found in the original Latin text of the *Meditation* 4 quotation.²⁶ Here is a comparison of line (3) in the above translation with Beyssade’s (3*):

- (3) In order to be free, there is no need for me to be inclined both ways
 (3*) In order to be free, there is no need for me to be able to go both ways.²⁷

As I have already indicated, (3) denies that indifference is necessary for free will whereas (3*) says the same about alternatives since it rejects the need for a two-way power or ability. Thus, according to Beyssade’s reading, Descartes puts forth the requirement of alternative possibilities provisionally in (1) but then later rejects it with (3*). It is (2) that signifies the essential feature of free will: spontaneity.

This, at least, is the view that Descartes held while writing the Latin version of the *Meditations*, published in 1641. By 1647, when the French version was issued, he had changed his mind. According to Beyssade, the turning point occurred sometime around the 1645 letter to Mesland. For convenience, I repeat the passage.

I would like you to notice that “indifference” in this context seems to me strictly to mean that state of the will when it is not impelled one way rather than another by any perception of truth or goodness. This is the sense which I took it when I said that the lowest degree of freedom is that by which we determine ourselves to things to which we are indifferent. But perhaps others mean by “indifference” a positive faculty of determining oneself to one or other of two contraries, that is to say, to pursue or avoid, to affirm or deny. I do not deny that the will has this positive faculty. (CSMK 245)

Again, the first sense is what I have been calling simply “indifference,” and Descartes is apparently alluding here to (6) from the *Meditations* quotation. He distinguishes this from the second sense of indifference, which I have been calling “alternatives”—“a positive faculty of determining oneself to one or other of two contraries”—using words reminiscent of passage (1). Here he seems to hold the position that I claim he held all along: alternatives and spontaneity are essential for free will but indifference is not.

However, according to Beyssade, the French edition of the *Meditations* “leaves it open for the reader to think that the two-way power is necessary for freedom—

something which the original Latin had explicitly denied."²⁸ She then suggests that even though "Descartes became more and more aware of the importance of the two-way power in freedom" he still held that "the essence of freedom does not amount to the two-way power" since "the greatest freedom consists in the spontaneous assent to the clearly known truth."²⁹

Beysade makes two claims in her interpretation which are important to distinguish: first, that Descartes's views on free will changed substantially from 1641 to 1647; second, that although Descartes became more appreciative of alternatives, he never believed them to be essential to free will. Given the second claim, Beysade is led to adopt the one-way compatibilist reading of Descartes. Thus, her second contention is more important for my purposes. I want to say that Descartes is a two-way compatibilist, and I don't care very much when he came to hold this view. For this reason, I reply only briefly to Beysade's first claim and then give a more extensive criticism of the one-way compatibilist interpretation.

I should confess that there is not much hope of my settling the textual question of whether (3) or (3*) provides a better translation of the original Latin. Beysade herself admits that the issue is "far from easy" and notes that there are others who support the CSM II reading, given at (3).³⁰ But there are a few points I can make against Beysade. For instance, there are the letters and essays written prior to 1645, in which Descartes claims that alternatives, as well as spontaneity, are fundamental to free will. Most notable are the above quoted passages from the *Fifth Replies* (CSM II, 260), written in 1641, and the *Principles* (CSM I, 205–206), published in 1644.

Moreover, Descartes seems to distinguish between the two senses of indifference in his 2 May 1644 letter to Mesland:

Since you regard freedom not simply as indifference but rather as a real and positive power to determine oneself, the difference between us is merely a verbal one — for I agree that the will has such a power. However, I do not see that it makes any difference to that power whether it is accompanied by indifference. . . .

As for animals that lack reason it is obvious that they are not free, since they do not have this positive power to determine themselves. (CSMK 234)

The comments here are very similar to those of the 1645 letter. There is the "positive power to determine oneself" which is essential to free will, and the *negative* power — indifference — which is not. It is true that in the 1644 letter, the power Descartes alludes to seems closer to spontaneity than alternatives, but as I've previously noted, there is good reason to think that Descartes believed the two to be essentially linked. Since there is no compelling reason to say that Descartes's theory of free will changed in any significant way from 1641 to 1647, I reject Beysade's first claim.

The second passage in which Descartes apparently rejects the requirement of alternatives is also mentioned by Beysade:³¹ "But freedom considered in the acts of the will at the moment when they are elicited does not entail any indifference taken in either the first or the second sense . . ." (CSMK 246). I wish I could say that Descartes is being merely ironic here, and if Descartes were Hume, perhaps I could. But it will take some doing to show that this quote is not damning. Let's see what immediately follows and try anyway: ". . . for what is done cannot remain undone as

long as it is being done. It consists simply in ease of operation; and at that point freedom, spontaneity and voluntariness are the same thing" (CSMK 246).

When Descartes talks about "the acts of the will at the moment when they are elicited," he is referring to actions once they begin to take place. I suggest that the point he is making is that the question of whether one could have done otherwise makes sense only when referenced to some time prior to this time of action. Keith Lehrer writes: "Statements affirming that a person can do something have a double time index, one time reference being to the time at which the person has the capability, and the second being to the time of action."³² Given the double time index noted by Lehrer, it makes sense to say that a person could have done otherwise, relative to some previous moment of time, even though, relative to the time at which the action was performed, the person could not have done otherwise.

An example might be helpful. A drunken driver cannot claim that his killing of a pedestrian was the result of an unfree act simply by pointing out that at the time of the accident, given his drunken state and the speed at which he was traveling, he could not have avoided hitting the victim. His act was freely done provided that there was some time prior to the accident when he could have done otherwise. Descartes believes (a) that to have free will, one must have alternative possibilities at some time but (b) that one can only have these alternatives prior to the time of action. The above passage is consistent with (a) and (b), yet (a) claims that alternatives are essential to free will. The passage does not provide evidence against Descartes's belief that alternatives are necessary for free will; it only places restrictions on when these alternatives take place.

Let me summarize the results so far. As difficult as it may be to explain how Descartes can consistently adopt two-way compatibilism, his acceptance of one-way compatibilism is even more untenable. The one-way interpretation relies on Descartes's belief that spontaneity is essential to free will, but roughly half of the passages that support this view indicate that our spontaneity is always conjoined with *some* two-way power. As for the two passages in which Descartes allegedly discards alternatives — CSMK 246 and AT VII, 57–58 — the latter refers, at most, to an early stage of Descartes's development, whereas the former is not damning so long as one pays careful attention to the logic of "could have" statements. Therefore, there is little reason to believe that Descartes endorses a one-way, as opposed to a two-way, compatibilism.

I turn now to the other claims of internal incoherence that have been leveled against my reading of Descartes: that alternatives and spontaneity "yield two different conceptions of freedom"³³ and that alternatives are essentially connected with indifference. Both claims involve a mistaken assumption about alternatives, namely, that alternatives cannot be adequately expressed in any compatibilist system. Though it is no fault of his, a famous quote of Hume's seems to be a major source of the difficulty. In the *Enquiry*, Hume writes: "Few are capable of distinguishing betwixt the liberty of *spontaneity*, as it is call'd in the schools, and the liberty of *indifference*; betwixt that which is oppos'd to violence, and that which means a negation of necessity and causes."³⁴ One problem with Hume's distinction is the implication that there are only two ways of thinking about free will: in terms of indifference and in

terms of spontaneity. If there is one thing that I could offer to historians who are studying accounts of the will, it is that alternatives offer us a third way of understanding freedom that allows for a broader spectrum of possible positions, one that is more representative of the actual views put forth by philosophers.

Left with only Hume's dichotomy, it is not surprising that philosophers tend to classify alternatives as a kind of indifference. For instance, Anthony Kenny writes:

Throughout the history of philosophy there have been two contrasting methods of expounding the nature of human freewill. The first is in terms of power: we are free in doing something if and only if it is in our power not to do it. The second is in terms of wanting: we are free in doing something if and only if we do it because we want to do it.³⁵

Later, after noting Hume's distinction, he adds: "Liberty defined in terms of wanting is liberty of spontaneity; liberty defined in terms of power is liberty of indifference."³⁶ This causes Kenny to classify alternatives as a *type* of indifference — for it is a "positive faculty" — which makes Descartes's theory seem blatantly inconsistent.³⁷

William James is a good example of a libertarian who links alternatives with indifference. When illustrating his notion of free choice, James imagines himself to come upon two streets, either one of which he could walk down to reach his destination. What does it mean to say that he has a genuine choice of which road to take?

It means that both Divinity Avenue and Oxford Street are called; but only one, and that one *either* one, shall be chosen. Now I ask you to seriously suppose that this ambiguity of my choice is real; and then to make the impossible hypothesis that the choice is made twice over, and each time falls on a different street. In other words, imagine that I first walk through Divinity Avenue, and then imagine that the powers that be annihilate ten minutes of time with all that it contained, and set me back at the door of this hall just as I was before the choice was made. Imagine then that, everything else being the same, I now make a different choice and traverse Oxford Street.³⁸

The power that James is alluding to — the power to make different choices *in the exact same set of circumstances* — does require indifference, for inasmuch as actions are attributable to agents, these circumstances will include the reasons one had for making those choices. If one's choices are compelled by reason — as INL suggests they sometimes are — one will make the same choices, given the same set of reasons, and will lack the power that James thinks is essential to free will. In a similar way, one might argue that this power is incompatible with determinism. Thus, though the compatibilist might claim that one can do otherwise, this is true only if we either change some feature of the past or alter the laws of nature. For the libertarian like James, though, free will requires *categorical* alternatives: one must be able to do otherwise in the exact same set of circumstances, with the same history and the same governing laws.³⁹ Since categorical alternatives require indifference, they are incompatible with determinism and those events that are locally determined according to INL.

Alternatives, however, have historically been thought of in at least two different ways: categorically, as James thinks of them, and hypothetically, as in the case of Hume and twentieth-century compatibilists like Moore.⁴⁰ One way, though not the

only way, of understanding hypothetical alternatives is given by the *standard hypothetical analysis*, or SHA: a person, S, has alternatives if and only if "S could have done otherwise," where this simply means that "S would have done otherwise if S had wanted (or chosen or tried) to do otherwise."⁴¹ Categorical alternatives are related to indifference but hypothetical ones are not. Here lies the kinship between Descartes's indifference and Hume's liberty of indifference: indifference is connected with categorical alternatives, which "means a negation of necessity." Hume saw that indifference entailed the falsity of determinism. For this reason, Descartes's rejection of indifference should lead us to think that he tends toward a compatibilist theory.

The distinction between categorical and hypothetical accounts of alternatives is one that philosophers like Kenny miss. I think it results in confusions about Descartes's theory, as well as Hume's. Hume, for instance, defines liberty as "a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will."⁴² If we think only of spontaneity and indifference — as Kenny does — it is difficult to classify this definition because it describes freedom as both a *power* and a *wanting*. It is more accurate to classify Hume as a two-way compatibilist who claims that alternatives are essential to free will and puts forth a hypothetical account to spell this out. Likewise, some philosophers fail to even consider Descartes's endorsement of alternatives since they equate them with a form of libertarianism that goes against his acceptance of INL and his rejection of indifference. However, there are other accounts of alternatives that Descartes might offer instead.

The following table is useful in understanding the various kinds of freedom discussed in this chapter and how they relate, in general, to theories of free will:

| | Two-way Compatibilism | One-way Compatibilism | Libertarianism |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Indifference: | not essential to FT | not essential to FT | essential to FT |
| Alternatives: | hypothetical | not essential to FT | categorical |
| Spontaneity: | adequate causes | adequate causes | original causes |

Descartes, I have argued, is a two-way compatibilist. He thinks that indifference is not essential to free will but that both alternatives and spontaneity are.⁴³

Descartes's Compatibilist Account of Alternatives

In this final section, I consider the external problem. What is at issue here is whether Descartes can offer an explication of alternatives that is consistent with his endorsement of INL. The 1645 letter to Mesland holds some important clues:

When a very evident reason moves us in one direction, although morally speaking we can hardly move in the contrary direction, absolutely speaking we can. For it is always open to us to hold back from pursuing a clearly known good, or from admitting a clearly perceived truth, provided we consider it a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of will by so doing. (CSMK 245)

Here Descartes makes a distinction between what we may call “moral alternatives” and “absolute alternatives.” He admits that given the truth of INL, we sometimes lack the former, yet this does not preclude us from having the latter. But what does it mean to say that we have absolute alternatives, according to Descartes? I consider four options.

First, one might appeal to the remark made later on in the 1645 letter to Mesland, and noted above, that with regard to “the acts of the will at the moment when they are elicited” we have no alternatives of any kind (CSMK 246). Given what I’ve said, perhaps our freedom during moments of clear and distinct perceptions is contingent on our having alternatives at some prior moment, when we do not have compelling reasons before us.⁴⁴ There is a comment in Descartes’s 1644 letter to Mesland that lends support to this interpretation:

But the nature of the soul is such that it hardly attends for more than a moment to a single thing; hence, as soon as our attention turns from the reasons which show us that the thing is good for us, and we merely keep in our memory the thought that it appeared desirable to us, we can call up before our mind some other reason to make us doubt it, so perhaps suspend our judgement, and perhaps even form a contrary judgement. (CSMK 233–234)

This way of thinking of Descartes’s theory of alternatives is dubious, however, for it goes against his insistence that we are “at our freest” when a “clear perception impels us to pursue some object” (CSM II, 292), which he seems to accept in this very same letter (see CSMK 233). It also suggests that some degree of indifference is necessary for our freedom, which Descartes emphatically denies in the letter (CSMK 233–235) and elsewhere.

Moreover, we can distinguish between the following three events: (a) the perception of evidentially compelling reasons, (b) the inclination of the will, and (c) the performance of some action. Given the way INL was specified at the beginning of this chapter, we might have to regard events (a) and (b) as occurring at the same instant,⁴⁵ but event (c) seems to be a slightly later event that we can “hold back from pursuing.” This would suggest that according to Descartes, we have alternatives at the time (a) and (b) occur but not at the time (c) occurs. Hence, the later comments in the 1645 letter are unhelpful in trying to figure out the crucial difference between moral and absolute alternatives. They would only be worthwhile if (a), (b), and (c) occurred simultaneously, which does not seem to be the case.

Second, one might suggest that absolute alternatives are equivalent to categorical ones.⁴⁶ As I have shown in the previous sections, however, Descartes is too much of a compatibilist for this view to be taken seriously. Additionally, his remarks from the 1644 letter to Mesland rule out this option: “For it seems to me that a great light in the intellect is followed by a great inclination in the will, so that if we see very clearly that a thing is good for us, it is very difficult—and, on my view, impossible as long as one continues in the same thought—to stop the course of our desire” (CSMK 233).⁴⁷ Here, too, Descartes admits that when we are presented with a clearly known good, a contrary action—one in which we do not pursue the good—is impossible “as long as one continues in the same thought.” Hence, categorically, we cannot do otherwise.

If we combine the information from the 1644 and 1645 letters to Mesland, it seems reasonable to suggest that the distinction between moral and absolute alternatives is *the same as* the distinction between categorical and hypothetical alternatives; that absolute alternatives simply are hypothetical alternatives. As I noted, the essential feature of categorical (or moral) alternatives is that one must be able to do otherwise *in the exact same set of circumstances*, with the same history and the same governing laws. On the other hand, what is essential to absolute (or hypothetical) alternatives is simply that they are *noncategorical*. Clearly, if INL—or determinism—is true, we sometimes lack categorical alternatives. Therefore, whether or not Descartes is able to escape the external problem comes down to whether we think categorical alternatives, as opposed to absolute ones, are *genuine alternatives*—the kind necessary for free will.

Since it is the best-known compatibilist theory of alternatives, it is reasonable to suppose that Descartes might offer an analysis like SHA in the 1645 letter to Mesland. The *Cartesian analysis*, as I call it, can be stated as follows:

“S could have done otherwise” = df. “S would have done otherwise if S had considered it a good thing to demonstrate that he had free will.”

This is the third option, and though it sheds some light on Descartes’s theory, the illumination is not necessarily advantageous. For consider this counterexample to SHA. Suppose that Sam is a kleptomaniac and steals a piece of candy. It may be true that *if Sam had chosen not to steal the candy, then he would not have stolen it*, but our feeling that Sam lacks freedom is precisely due to our thought that he could not have *chosen* differently. The conditional is true, but he could not have done otherwise. Therefore, SHA is deficient. Similar remarks can be made about the Cartesian analysis, for we may ask: could S have considered it a good thing to demonstrate that he had free will? Descartes does seem to think that such considerations are “always open to us,” but we might well wonder what reason there is for believing this. Since there is nothing to warrant that S *could* always consider a demonstration of free will a good thing, the analysis cannot guarantee that S has alternatives.⁴⁸

It’s important not to make too much of these observations. They should not, for instance, lead us to automatically reject all compatibilist theories of alternatives. Clearly there is room in logical space between SHA-type analyses and categorical alternatives, and a great deal, if not all, of this room is left for the compatibilist. At most we can only conclude that single conditional analyses of alternatives are defective. Of course, any noncategorical account of alternatives will involve conditionals of some sort. But it is incorrect to burden the compatibilist with single conditionals like the ones in SHA and the Cartesian analysis.⁴⁹

This brings me to the fourth and final way in which Descartes might respond to the external problem. His comments should not be construed as putting forth an *analysis*—a set of necessary and sufficient conditions—for such a formal approach is not needed. I think he can rebut the external problem as long as he provides an opposing account of alternatives that is better than the one offered by the incompatibilist. That he has a different account is clear from his distinction between cate-

gorical (or moral) and absolute alternatives. What is essential to Descartes's theory is his endorsement of the following:

S could have done other wise only if (1) S would have done otherwise if S had different reasons and (2) S would have had different reasons if certain aspects about the past had been different.

The claim that we can always "consider it a good thing to demonstrate the freedom of will" is, therefore, best understood as an *example*, one way in which we could come to have different reasons but not the only way. Statement (2) is meant to include this example but to include others, too. As such, the account offered by Descartes is not intended to provide sufficient conditions for having alternatives. For instance, it is logically possible for Sam, the kleptomaniac, to come up with a reason that would prevent him from stealing the candy, but this should not lead us to believe that he could have avoided stealing the candy. Still, (1) and (2) might make up necessary conditions.

Now, why should we think that Descartes's account provides a satisfactory understanding of genuine alternatives? Mainly because the incompatibilist cannot offer a better one. For instance, if we tried to construct a formal analysis of categorical alternatives, along the lines of SHA, we'd get the following:

"S could have done otherwise" = df. "S would have done otherwise if the circumstances were exactly the same."

But this cannot be what is meant. A more accurate understanding would yield this:

"S could have done otherwise" = df. "S could have done otherwise in the exact same set of circumstances."

Yet as an analysis, this is inadequate since what we want to know is what it means to say that one *can* do otherwise in the exact same set of circumstances.

If we suppose that there is no compatibilist analysis of alternatives, libertarians and compatibilists are on equal ground, for clearly the former has none to offer.⁵⁰ Of course, they both share certain pretheoretical conceptions and agree on at least *some* formal developments. Together these are helpful in determining that certain accounts — like SHA — are wrong. But none of this is sharp enough when it comes to choosing between categorical and absolute alternatives. Consider, for instance, the counterexample to SHA. We know that kleptomaniacs, like Sam, lack alternatives, but we do not know if they lack *categorical* ones. The example is not rich enough to tell us whether Sam has alternatives in the categorical or absolute sense. Now, if a formal analysis of alternatives cannot be given, we do not have a clear sense of what might be missing from the noncategorical accounts. So then, how could we know that these accounts lack something essential to free will? On what basis could we determine that absolute alternatives are, in some way, inadequate?

One might say that Descartes's theory is faulty because absolute alternatives are not genuine alternatives; categorical ones are. But this clearly begs the question, for

how are we to know which alternatives *are* the kind that are necessary for free will? One could also point out that Descartes has not proven that absolute alternatives are genuine alternatives, so his claim is left unsupported. But as I noted, the incompatibilist is no better off in this respect. Presumably, such a justification would require an analysis of alternatives, and we are supposing that there is none available, categorical or otherwise.

Perhaps there is a difference between categorical and absolute alternatives in that the latter have been ruled out by the argument for incompatibilism, noted above. But if we look carefully, we can see that this is not so. According to the logic of the argument for incompatibilism, I cannot do otherwise, given determinism, unless I can alter either the past or the laws of nature. But a compatibilist can reject this. All that need be the case is that the past or laws of nature could have, in some absolute sense, been otherwise, not that I could have done anything to change either of them. This is the significance of clause (2) in Descartes's account. Following Lehrer and Lewis, we can distinguish between these two assertions:

Weak thesis: I am able to do something such that, if I did it, the past would be different.

Strong thesis: I am able to change the past.⁵¹

The compatibilist accepts the weak thesis, not the strong one. But it is the strong thesis that is needed for the argument for incompatibilism to be sound.⁵²

So far I have suggested that categorical and absolute alternatives are on a par, but there is at least one important difference. When it comes to supporting our judgments of free will and moral responsibility, absolute alternatives have a distinct advantage. Consider, for instance, the case of Sam, the kleptomaniac. I cannot imagine how we could even begin to determine whether or not Sam lacks categorical alternatives, although I would hope that we can conclude that he lacks genuine alternatives and is, therefore, neither free nor morally responsible for his actions. After all, it is this judgment that caused us to reject SHA in the first place. Sam might well be a kleptomaniac even though he performs quite random acts that are not a consequence of the past and the laws of nature. That is, he might have categorical alternatives and yet be neither free nor morally responsible for his actions.

Here's where absolute alternatives are vastly superior. The judgment that Sam lacks alternatives is related to considerations of what Lehrer calls "circumstantial variety": "The greater the variety of circumstances under which we have seen the person perform an action, the more justified we are in claiming to know that he can perform it."⁵³ It is precisely because Sam tends *always* to steal — no matter what reasons he has before him or what situation he encounters — that we regard him as not having alternatives, not being free, and not being responsible for his actions. Of course, we can imagine situations where his actions might differ, but none of these are *accessible* to Sam. More important, the notion of accessibility seems unrelated to categorical alternatives.⁵⁴ It is not simply that Sam, as he is at this moment, with his past and the laws of nature tied to him, cannot do otherwise but also that Sam's actions would be no different even if we were to alter most of the circumstances surrounding them. We would have to radically alter Sam's past before we could gain the vari-

ability apparent in so-called "normal" cases. And it is these reflections about differing counterfactual situations—including those alterations of the past essential to absolute alternatives—that motivate our attributions of free will and moral responsibility. In this respect, determining what Sam could have done in the *exact same* situation is of little help.

Of course, there is more to say on this issue. Ultimately one needs to completely specify the difference between proper and improper alterations of the past in order to determine whether or not Sam has genuine alternatives,⁵⁵ but there is little reason to think that categorical alternatives are required in order to do so. Thus, there is good reason to think that Descartes offers a plausible solution to the conflict between two-way compatibilism and INL: INL deprives us of categorical alternatives but not absolute ones, and only the latter are necessary for free will. Though Descartes has not told us everything we need to know about the nature of the will, it seems to me that he has not left anything out that an incompatibilist has more clearly explained. More important, it is in those areas where Descartes's theory is lacking that much of the work on free will is still taking place.⁵⁶

Notes

1. Chappell 1994, p. 180. See also Kenny 1972, p. 17; Cottingham 1993, pp. 65–66, 87; Beyssade 1994, p. 194.
2. Chappell, p. 181. See also Kenny, p. 31; Cottingham, p. 65; Chappell, p. 189.
3. See Kenny, p. 31; Imlay 1982, pp. 91–2.
4. See Kenny, pp. 29–30; Beyssade, p. 205; Cottingham, pp. 64–65.
5. Cottingham 1993, 64–65.
6. Imlay, p. 89. See also Cottingham, 64–65. Imlay thinks that this inconsistency can be resolved but at the cost of suggesting that INL is "in the final analysis incoherent as far as Descartes is concerned" (p. 87; see also pp. 94–96). This doesn't strike me as much of a resolution.
7. For a discussion of these problems, see Chappell 1994, 184 and 190.
8. Two-way compatibilism is similar to that which I have previously called "strong compatibilism" (Campbell 1997). For examples, see Hume 1975, Moore 1912, Lehrer 1976, Lewis 1981, and Campbell 1997.
9. See Beyssade 1994. The name "one-way compatibilism" is derived, in part, from comments made to me by Stephen Voss and is similar to what I have previously called "weak compatibilism" (Campbell 1997). For examples, see Frankfurt 1971 and Fischer 1994.
10. Most of the definitions used in this section are taken from three sources: Lewis 1981; van Inwagen 1983; Kane 1985.
11. See, especially, Campbell 1957.
12. Kane 1985, 19–20.
13. See van Inwagen 1983, 8, and Chappell 1995, 273.
14. Moore 1912, 87. Libertarians tend to embrace the requirement of alternative possibilities since this is the likely basis for their incompatibilism. Also many important compatibilists have done so (see Lehrer 1976; Hume 1975; Moore; and, I argue, Descartes). Even many one-way compatibilists who think that free will is not essential to moral responsibility generally think that it requires alternatives, though some other, more relevant freedom might not (see Fischer 1994). Spinoza, who denies FT, does so, in part, because free will requires alternatives (Curley; E IIP48).

15. Lewis 1981, 113. See also van Inwagen 1983, 13–14. At the suggestion of Bennett, I avoid use of the terms "hard" and "soft determinism" since they often mislead people into thinking that it is the *determinism* that is hard or soft, which is not the case.

16. See Chappell 1994, 189–190. See also CSM I, 201, 240.

17. This term is first used in Delahunty 1985 but appears in the appendix to Bennett 1984, and the references suggest that Bennett intended it to have the meaning I give it. See also Edwin Curley and Gregory Walski, in this volume.

18. This is a slightly altered version of "the Consequent Argument" in van Inwagen 1983, 16.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

20. For criticisms see Lehrer 1980, 199, and Lewis 1981.

21. Vere Chappell writes: "The inability of the mind to be mistaken when it affirms what it clearly and distinctly perceives is the ultimate basis of secure human knowledge" (Chappell 1994, 182). For a more detailed discussion of INL and its importance to the *Meditations*, see Kenny 1972, 19ff. and, especially, 29.

22. See Campbell 1957 and, for a criticism, see Lehrer 1966.

23. Note that this use of the term "libertarian," standard among contemporary writers on free will, is different from the meaning given to it in Chappell 1994.

24. See Campbell 1957, Taylor 1963, and Chisholm 1964.

25. See Lehrer 1976, 267, for an argument against this position, though it is generally accepted by both compatibilists and incompatibilists. The term "adequate cause" is from Spinoza (Curley; E IIID1ff.).

26. The Latin is "Neque enim opus est me in utramque partem ferri posse" (AT 57).

27. Beyssade 1994, 193ff.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 194–195.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 205; see also 201.

30. See Beyssade 1994, 194, and Cottingham 1993, 65, for a translation similar to Beyssade's. See also Kenny 1972, 18–19, who advocates Peter Geach's translation, which is similar to the CSM II version. Interestingly enough, the CSM II translation of the *Meditations* is Cottingham's own, so by 1993 he seems to have changed his mind about this passage.

31. See Beyssade 1994, 203; Kenny 1972, 29–30; Imlay 1982, 93. It was Russell Wahl, however, who convinced me of the significance of this passage in his comments about a previous version of this chapter.

32. Lehrer 1976, 243.

33. Chappell 1994, 181.

34. Hume 1978, 407; see also Kenny 1972, 17; Imlay 1982, 88–89.

35. Kenny 1972, 17.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29. See Cottingham 1993, 65, for a similar mistake.

38. James 1948, 44.

39. See Campbell 1957, 158–179.

40. See Hume 1975, 95, and Moore 1912, 84–95. Moore is often thought to be the father of the standard hypothetical analysis, which immediately follows. However, Moore's explication of alternatives is different in important respects from the more standard one, although the difference has often gone unnoticed. For Moore's account, see especially p. 94.

41. See Lehrer 1980, 187. Lehrer, of course, rejects this analysis.

42. Hume 1975, 95.

43. This table paints in broad strokes; I am not suggesting that it represents all views of human freedom. Consider, for instance, the theories of Spinoza and Keith Lehrer. Spinoza is a necessitarian of a sort that at least rejects free will in the traditional sense. Still, he gives

an account of freedom that is explicable in terms of adequate causes (Curley; E III, V). Lehrer is a compatibilist who hints at explaining freedom of spontaneity in terms of original causes (Lehrer 1976, 266–268). But even these detractors are best understood in light of the three kinds of freedom and the ways in which they diverge from more traditional paths.

44. This way of understanding Cartesian alternatives was first made clear to me by Russell Wahl, who attributed it to Jean-Marie Beyssade. See also Imlay 1982, 92ff. for a presentation, and then a rejection, of a similar line of thought, which he claims is held by Jean Lapport.

45. See Cottingham 1993, 64–65.

46. For an example of this mistake, see Imlay 1982.

47. Russell Wahl brought this quotation to my attention, though he thinks it does my view more harm than good.

48. See Lehrer 1976, 248–250. I thank Michael O'Rourke, Geoffrey Gorham, and Stephen Voss for convincing me that the Cartesian analysis is no better than SHA.

49. See Lehrer 1980.

50. For compatibilist analyses of alternatives that have not, to my knowledge, been refuted, see Lehrer 1976 and Campbell 1997.

51. See Lehrer 1980, 199, and Lewis 1981, 115.

52. According to the incompatibilist argument, alternatives are closed under entailment; according to the compatibilist, they are not. The issue of whether or not the incompatibilist argument is sound is indistinguishable from questions about the logic of "can" and its cognates.

53. Lehrer 1966, 175.

54. For more on accessibility, see Campbell 1997.

55. See Lehrer 1976 and Campbell 1997.

56. Much of the research for this project was completed while attending Jonathan Bennett's 1995 NEH Summer Seminar. I thank the National Endowment for the Humanities for support and Bennett and others attending the seminar for useful discussions. For written comments, I thank Bennett; Daniel Flage; Geoffrey Gorham; David Shier; Stephen Voss; Russell Wahl, who commented on a version of the chapter read at the 1997 Northwest Conference on Philosophy; and especially, Michael O'Rourke, who made extensive remarks on each of my many drafts. Finally, I thank the faculty and students of Washington State University and the University of Idaho who were in the audience for an earlier talk I gave on this subject.

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