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University of Northern Colorado  
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DETERMINISM AND FREE WILL: AN EXPLORATION ON  
GENDER IDENTITY AS EVIDENCE FOR COMPATIBILISM

A Capstone  
Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment for Graduation with Honors Distinction and  
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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College of Humanities and Social Sciences

May 2024

DETERMINISM AND FREE WILL: AN EXPLORATION ON  
GENDER IDENTITY AS EVIDENCE FOR COMPATIBILISM

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## Abstract

Determinism is a philosophical concept asserting that every event and action in the universe has been determined by previous causes, which has caused considerable debate within philosophy. Two critical issues within this discussion are the implications of determinism for human agency and moral responsibility. In this work, I argue that free will is possible, rejecting hard determinism. Specifically, I will be arguing in favor of *compatibilism*, which is the view that free will can exist even within a deterministic world. From this perspective, free will is not opposed to determinism. Instead, our choices and actions can still be considered free under a deterministic framework.

This paper extends the scope of compatibilism by applying it to the field of gender identity, pulling from queer theory the argument that gender identity is innately performative. Through this lens, gender is considered a social construct subject to change, personal interpretation, and performance. These views align with compatibilism, challenging traditional notions of gender and allowing inclusivity and coherence in understanding our identity within the self. This paper utilizes comparative analysis, logical reasoning, and thought experiments to examine the connection between determinism and gender identity. This article explores how these seemingly disconnected concepts can inform one another. Furthermore, it highlights the implications of a compatibilist stance using gender identity as evidence that individuals can have free will with their identity while also identity being determined. The development of this perspective on gender identity will shed light on philosophical inquiries of the self and human experience.

**Keywords: Determinism, Freewill, Gender Identity, Moral Responsibility, Hard Determinism, Compatibilism**

## Introduction

Imagine a world where every action, choice, thought, and identity has been determined to happen without an ounce of free will. Philosophers have wondered about free will since at least ancient Greece and it has been approached by many philosophical figures. Many have engaged in this debate over the past century about having or not having free will because it is important to know whether we have control over our lives. While this debate has been prominent in philosophical thought, more recently, there has been an emergence of work connecting free will and moral responsibility. In philosophy, and specifically in metaphysics, the main goal is to construct a rational account of our universe. Metaphysics is a vast topic but can be narrowly described as studies that seek to explain the fundamentals of our reality (Ney, 2016; van Inwagen et al., 2023). Metaphysics: usually, it focuses on things outside the physical realm and more on abstract concepts such as consciousness, free will, reality, ontology, and more (Ney, 2016; van Inwagen et al., 2023). On the topic of free will and determinism, connections have been made with other disciplines, such as religion, race, biology, and politics (O’Conner et al., 2022).

The concern now is knowing the implications of a determined universe and its effects on humans. Several disciplines have gone on to explain some implications of our actions (for example, history and political science) or identities (such as religion or race). While such disciplines arose in the distant past, newer ones, like gender studies, have emerged recently. Perhaps because of this recent situation, there is a gap in exploring how a classical philosophical issue — of determinism and free will — affects questions on identity and how they define our moral responsibility as humans under the guise of free will. It is crucial to understand the effects of these questions on identity because this can shape our conceptions of identity and moral

responsibility. Most available work is either through the lens of the free will/determinism debate or in various attempts to explore what gender identity is, with little work done connecting the two. It is important to know that metaphysical truths have often been assumed or implicitly accepted, without question about how it impacts the debate. However, there are important implications of how one answers the free will debate in how their understanding affects questions about things like personal identity.

This paper explores two significant questions within metaphysics: *To what extent is our world determined, and if the world is at least partially determined, does this rule out the possibility of human free will? What implications does gender identity have for determinism?*

The paper is set up into three sections, each having subthemes. The first two sections will address each of the questions by going over potential ways to solve each question and finalizing an answer. Each section analyzes potential solutions to the question, by considering the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal, as well as considering relevant thought experiments. The last will conclude and tie up how gender identity can be a way of analyzing the determinism and free will debate. This is important within the philosophical debate in understanding the self and the metaphysical essence of identity.

**To what Extent is our World Determined, and if the World is at Least Determined, does this Rule out the Possibility of Human Free Will?**

**Understanding Determinism – The Compatibilist vs the Incompatibilist Approach**

To approach the first question, we need to know what determinism is. Determinism explains that everything in the universe, from the events and actions of an individual to larger events such as war, has been predetermined by past events or actions, meaning that people do not

have a choice in how their future unfolds (Ney, 2016; Peroutka, 2022; Visala, 2013). When pondering if our world is determined and if we have free will, it depends on what type of stance is being taken. Many philosophers believe there is a distinction between two types of freedom, surface freedom, and ultimate freedom (sometimes called "deeper" freedom), as presented by Robert Kane (Ney, 2016; Visala, 2013). According to Ney (2016, p.240), *ultimate freedom* is defined as "[...]having the ability to satisfy one's desire and being the ultimate source of those desires." This means that our actions are inherently done out of our volition without coercion or desire, such as hunger, pressure, etc. Ultimate freedom explains that we as individuals can be the first cause of causing other things to happen (Ney, 2016; Visala, 2013).

In contrast, *surface freedom* is described as "[...]being able to act in such a way that one's desires are satisfied" (Ney, 2016, p.240). What surface freedom tries to explain is that actions are caused by outside causes affecting us. In this work, we are most concerned with the more profound freedom as it alludes to us having free will. When considering more profound freedom, the question is whether our desires are inherently our own (Balaguer, 2009; Ney, 2016; Visala, 2013). On the other hand, if we do not have freedom, it could be because all is determined. Determinism is the view that we are not the causes of our actions and that they were predetermined for us to do. Philosophers have long argued about whether determinism is true. In addition to asking whether the view is true, philosophers ask how free will interacts with determinism. Some philosophers argue that determinism and free will cannot coexist. For example, ponder this debate, as characterized by Balaguer (2009):

1. [If] Determinism is true (i.e., every event is causally necessitated by prior events together with causal laws.
2. Human beings have free will, [therefore]



### 3. Free will is incompatible with determinism.

This is one way to derive the conclusion that free will is incompatible with determinism. Of course, within the argument there is considerable debate about the truth of the second premise (Balaguer, 2009). Different schools of determinism try to prove that the world is determined while making arguments to support their claims. In addition to considering whether determinism is true, philosophers ask how free will interacts with determinism. The concept of free will is that we decide our actions without a metaphysical constraint to act freely. Determinism puts a restriction on our sense of free will because it contradicts our ability to act freely, if what we do was already determined through past events or by the laws of nature (Balaguer, 2009; Peroutka, 2022; Ney, 2016; Visala, 2013). The two prominent positions when considering the intersection of free will and determinism are compatibilism and incompatibilism.

Compatibilism is a stance that argues that determinism and free will are intertwined. Contemplate that specific events in a person's life are determined, such as biological factors can influence such as the number of children you can have; you cannot control where you will live, what job you will have, who will be your friends; and talents that are beyond control and more. Even with some events being determined there are some events that are not determined, in which the action that are taken within those events leads to different paths. The ability of these choices show that there are some undetermined aspects to our reality. While this example can show compatibilism, such emergent theories argue that free will is possible based on the willingness to meet one's desires.

In contrast, others have gone on to explain that compatibilism is possible based on answering 'the ability to do so otherwise,' which argues that under a determined world, an individual cannot do a separate action besides the action that they have already done (Lewis,

1981; Ney, 2016). Compatibilists who argue for 'one-way freedom' can use this to respond to 'the ability to do so otherwise' by stating that the past determines the future, and based on different past actions, the result can change (Hume, 1975). Therefore, the world is compatible because if there are other past actions, those actions cause a distant future to occur (which can lead to the same ending point). So, if the past can be altered in some way through human action (whether those past actions are different), sole agency of the individual caused the future to change (even if the ending is still exact), meaning that humans have a sense of free will (Hume, 1975; Ney, 2016; Visala, 2013).

There are two main approaches to compatibilism, which are the libertarian approach and the existential approach. The libertarian (libertarianism) and the existential (existentialism) approach are the central theories used to describe a compatibilist process to determine whether we have free will. The work done on these prospective regions provides a lens of how a world looks under a compatible (soft-determined) world. The libertarian approach uses the guise that humans are the causes of action (Hume, 1975; Peroutka, 2022; Ney, 2016; Visala, 2013). The approach made by libertarians means that the actions made are not only caused by another force, such as nature or the past, but by the person. The works on libertarians, while convincing, can be later adopted by Kane and expand the notion of self-forming actions, which describes that the individual's actions will shape the individual (Kane, 1999; Kane, 2016; Ney, 2016). Then there is the existential approach to compatibilism, which states that what we do determines our personhood (Ney, 2016). Meaning that our actions will determine our future, meaning existence precedes the essence under a determined world. For example, our actions (the existence) come first, which will then consider the individual as a whole (the essence) (Busch, 1999; Kane, 1999; Sartre, 1945 [1956]; Ney, 2016).

While some view determinism and free will as compatible, some argue that there is no such thing as a compatible approach to determinism and free will. There are two main approaches to incompatibilism: hard incompatibilists, and hard determinists. Hard incompatibilists reject that determinism and free will exist (Pink 2004, Ney 2016). This means that when looking at determinism they reject the notions that actions have been predetermined; and on free will they also reject that humans have inherent free will to do otherwise. The next approach is known as hard determinism (determinist), which explains that our actions are determined by the laws of nature or the past (Pink, 2004; Ney, 2016; Pereboom, 2001; Wegner, 2002). While the works of hard determinism argue why determinism and free will are mutually exclusive, an interesting point is the implications of moral responsibility. It presupposes that the past or nature determines all human behavior and action; we cannot impede responsibility for the actions onto an individual (Pink, 2004; Ney, 2016; Pereboom, 2001; Wegner, 2002). While some, like Pereboom and Wegner, argue that free will can be considered as an illusion to describe our emotions as humans, on the other hand, these emotions in an ontological sense are meaningless (Ney, 2016; Pereboom, 2001; Wegner, 2002). Because of the work done by incompatibilists, many philosophers agree that moral responsibility and free will are connected. It is important to note that not all incompatibilists reject the idea of moral responsibility the same way, some may even have different interpretations of moral responsibility under determinism (Pink, 2004; Ney, 2016). Since there is an underlying connotation of whether free will is true, then our emotions are valid on the premise of virtue or moral responsibility. If untrue, then things like virtues or emotions are meaningless since we can't fault someone's actions if they were presupposed to do those actions (no matter how minor or extreme it is).

With regards to the perspectives of hard determinism there are questions of how life is approached. If determinism is held true, then there are hard implications when it comes to how we approach the world. Consider prisoners being punished for crimes committed, under determinism, they have been predetermined to cause those crimes with no way of stopping them. This means that we are treating criminals unjustly because we are punishing them for actions, they have no control over; or at the very least determinism undermines our moral and legal ability to run a society. Or evaluate the example that people who are determined to commit a crime are also determined to receive that punishment. This seems hard to accept because while the person may be determined to receive punishment, it will still raise questions as to how we evaluate punishment within society because while the person is determined to face punishment, we question if it should be justified.

Debating the implications of free will such as libertarians arguing that determinism and free will are incompatible and that humans have inherent free will, and hard determinist that argue the same incompatibility but that we don't have free will and free will is just an illusion (Duss-Otterström, 2008). It seems very unconvincing to act on the mere assumption that if free will is untrue then we accept hard determinism or do the opposite and argue that hard determinism is false. From research on the brain or through experimental philosophy, it becomes harder to provide hard evidence that proves that either approach is true. While the evidence may be unconvincing to either reject the libertarian approach or the hard-deterministic approach, it seems to all come down creating an assertion if free will is true.

Because of the concerns listed above it seems difficult to accept the libertarian approach or the hard determinists approach because of the myriad of objections to both sides. While I find the two unconvincing, I do find the compatibilist approach to be more convincing when it comes

to answering the free will debate. I find compatibilism to be more convincing because it can answer concerns with incompatibilists theories, such as how we run society on moral responsibility and our current understanding of the human experience; but also concerns within libertarians such as how some things may be deterministic in our lives. I will now explore these concerns in more depth. I believe that both libertarians and hard determinists fail because it *does not entail societal and biological understanding of the human experience and evidence for either approach is too inconclusive to accept*. Because the two statements outline why I believe that both approaches are wrong, I will argue that compatibilism is able to answer both concerns outlined.

### **Why Hard-Determinism & Libertarianism Fails – Potential Evidence for the Determinism Debate**

Most of the concerns listed above correspond to philosophical arguments, which either support or deny a theory of determinism. I argue that these concerns are solved by compatibilism. When considering societal setup and biological understanding of the human experience, I argue that each of them have concerns that compatibilism does not. If we accept determinism, it fundamentally will undermine the way that we as humans would function as a society. It means that politics and questions on morality are minute and irrational to think about. As explained by Isaiah Berlin, “There are some terms which, if we took determinism seriously [...] such notions as justice, equity, desert, fairness would have certainly have to be re-examined if they were to be kept alive at all and not relegated to the role of discarded figments [...] If determinism is valid, this is a price that we must pay” (Berlin, 2002, p.15). This means that if we accept that determinism is true, we need to reconstruct the way that we view society. Berlin

states that there needs to be a distinction whether determinism is true, versus, what are the consequences of believing in determinism. In trying to prove if determinism is true or false, the real implication is if we should believe in determinism. For example, if determinism is true but is believed as false (or vice-versus) we would carry on the same as a society because, if it is true but believed as false, we carry the illusion of free will to explain society; and on the other end we do have free will and believe that determinism is false, we are programmed and conditioned by determinism to believe it that way.

When concerning the debate over the truth of determinisms, experimental philosophers have done experiments to show reactions and behavioral changes when people are to believe that free will exists or when hard determinism is true (Nadelhoffer & Monroe, 2022; Nicholas, 2007). While the work done in the past has each gone on to prove different results of people being either compatibilist or incompatibilist, they all give information to whether agents have responsibility over themselves in a deterministic world (Nadelhoffer & Monroe, 2022; Nicholas, 2007). Many experimental philosophical studies approach how people's opinions can change based on a prompt that would make subjects make choices under the guise of whether they have free will and collect how they will react under those prompts. They noticed that some people's values change when dealing with life in a deterministic or indeterministic world (while the behavior results prove inconsistent) (Nadelhoffer & Monroe, 2022; Nicholas, 2007). This brings a separate question about how belief in determinism can change the way in which people react or behave.

While the work in experimental philosophy has inconsistent results in explaining human behavior concerning free will and our moral responsibility, it provides insight into how a society reacts under beliefs about determinism. While the work of moral responsibility has been touched

by incompatibilists, getting a population's view on this topic seems beneficial. That benefit comes from understanding people and how a majority would react in a deterministic or indeterministic world. These types of research can best show the understanding of individual belief in determinism, but it cannot prove if determinism is inherently true. This is why I believe that hard determinism fails, it seems difficult to provide sufficient evidence that proves that determinism is true or false, all we can do is prove whether perceptions of determinism influence individuals. Because of these behavioral differences it can be argued that we have some level of free will. Consider this thought experiment labeled as the Jeremy thought experiment:

1. If determinism is true, every action has been predetermined.
2. If every action has been predetermined, moral responsibility should not be placed on the individual.
3. Jeremy robs a bank.
4. If determinism is true, Jeremy is predetermined to rob the bank.
5. Therefore, Jeremy is not morally responsible for his crime.

When reflecting on this thought experiment, it can be argued that under a predetermined world Jeremy would not be held morally responsible for the crime but when approached to different people and removing or adding more context to it, you can change your belief if Jeremy is held responsible. Consider this edited version of the experiment:

1. If determinism is not true, people have choice for their actions.
2. People are held morally responsible for their actions.
3. Jeremy robs a bank.
4. Because Jeremy has a choice, Jeremy is responsible for robbing the bank.
5. Therefore, Jeremy is morally responsible for robbing the bank.

This version can argue that Jeremy can be held morally responsible for their actions in committing a crime. Because of changes in perception, you can have varying opinions of behavior, this raises the question of whether we should even believe in determinism.

While experimentation has mixed results, it does bring out that people have changes in behavior when accepting determinism and our free will. It seems very unconvincing to state that determinism can cause a multitude of different behaviors when it comes to human behavior, some experiments done by neuroscientists state that our activity and behavior is based on networking of the brain and that we are at will to our neural network. People fall to using science to prove the determinism debate so that there can be hard evidence to prove that determinism is real or not (Nahmias, 2014).

1. Free will requires that determinism is not the case.
2. Science is showing that determinism is the case (for humans).
3. Thus, science is showing that humans lack free will (Nahmias, 2014)

For example, Libet experiments tracked the decision-making process as it leads to actions, which has been used to argue that we do not have free will (Brass et al., 2019; Nichols and Knobe, 2007). This means that decisions have been made before we have any conscious thought of it. The works done by Libet, and fellow neuroscientists have been adopted and continue to be experimented on to show that there is a predetermined aspect of conscious thoughts using neuron mapping or through fMRI and EEG scans (Fried et al., 2011; Nichols and Knobe, 2007; Soon et al., 2008). Examples like Libet have been used to show that neuroscientific experiments may provide sufficient evidence that our own conscious beliefs are determined.

When looking at Libet the concern is if the reasoning and interpretation of the data prove free will. I argue that it does not, studies like Libet's experiments, their conclusion assumes that there



is an unconscious neural network that determines our actions before we have any conscious thoughts of it (Nichols and Knobe, 2007). For example, we may pick up an item without thinking about it because it was determined to happen before conscious thought. Nichols and Knobe (2007) state that these experiments are compatible with free will because the results of brain activity before conscious decisions reflect a neural decision process rather than the decision itself. The decision becomes present when we have conscious thought through those neural networks (Nichols and Knobe, 2007). So, most activity reflected through the neural network is neurons firing information without determining our actions. While the work in neuroscience and psychology tries to answer questions on free will, it is essential to understand that logical reasoning is misguided here. Most works done that support a determined world associate brain activity with determinism without much evidence to support it besides fMRI and EEG scans showing brain activity. At most, studies like Libet can be used in a compatible approach to determinism. If we accept hard determinism, it means that we must accept that the neural networking proceeding conscious awareness predetermines every action that we make. This seems unlikely because our current understanding of the brain shows that neural networking can influence our decisions, but it does not fully determine all our decisions (Nahmias, 2014; Nichols & Knobe, 2007). Overall, the results of these experiments still leave open the idea of whether free will is valid. Because of our current understanding of the human experience, it seems difficult to rely solely on Libet type of experiments because at most these studies can show a correlation of decision making but not complete decision making. Then with experimental philosophy it shows that individual changes in behavior happen when people believe in determinism. With experimental philosophy it brings light that believing in determinism changes

the way that we value society and how we approach it which answers concerns when of incompatibilists of how we should evaluate society.

Beyond Libet type of experiments, more recently neurobiologist Robert Sapolsky a professor of biology and neurology at Stanford released a book called, “Determined: Life Without Free Will”, which used neurobiology and other scientific research to show that humans do not have inherent free will. While his work has been criticized extensively for not providing a clear definition of determinism and free will, and that there are contradictions to his work, it does provide resourceful evidence that may follow an incompatibilists stance within this debate (Maoz, 2023). Sapolsky is another individual that has added on to other neurological research to show that behaviors and decisions have been predetermined by other events. He cites evidence and studies such as Libet and others to show unconscious neural networking proceeding decision making, he also goes on to state that the way an individual has been nurtured, and their genetic makeup. There is a main concern that shows up when reading incompatibilist applying scientific studies to prove determinism is that they tend to simplify behavior and the brain which leads to an error of these researchers’ equating correlation with causation. Such as Sapolsky stating that our decision is influenced by environments, neural networking, nurture, genetics, epigenetics, etc.; they play a role in our decision making but the problem is that these factors influence behavior, not create behavior. This means that Sapolsky’s argument is deterred because by his own admission you can’t pinpoint total control of decision on a single neuron, but you can when considering the brain, as one unit (Sapolsky, 2023). This causes issues because he then falls trap in to how the brain can make a collective experience, he answers that biology or neuroscience today cannot show that determinism is real or fake but when you combine all the science it will show that free will not exist (Sapolsky, 2023). This causes some issues such as that he does not

provide the culmination of science, and no one will be able to because all of science does not show determinism. When looking at biology you can see that your genetics are determined by proceeding events before your existence, but complex human behavior show that we have free will as provided by experimental philosophy that we do have free will based on changes in behavior when believing in determinism. This reasoning shows that not only are incompatibilists wrong because of sciences alone cannot prove determinism and the evidence that is available show that we do have some free will of our actions and that Libertarians fail because incompatibilists theories bring up a good argument that there are some things that are predetermined: your location, genetics, time in space, etc.; which show that we do have some predetermine attributes. The concerns listed above show prevalence within incompatibilists theories and libertarian theory and the following section will show that compatibilist theories solve for these concerns.

### **Why Compatibilism Answers the Concerns of Libertarians and Incompatibilists**

The concerns seen in Libertarians and Incompatibilists are answered when looking at compatibilism. To summarize, the main concerns brought with incompatibilists, and libertarians is that they fail to interact with our biological and societal understanding of the human experience. I will first address the biological concern; it seems more believable to accept that some aspects in our biology are predetermined and undetermined. First our predetermined aspects; your DNA, and the time and location in the universe you are in. The things listed in the previous sentence are things that you have no control of in your life, things such as DNA formation and your placement in the world are things that we did not willingly choose. Then some undetermined aspects are human behavior, experience, and epigenetics. While the

reasoning may be simple, it is a strong objection to the Libertarian viewpoint in which we as ourselves are the causes of our own actions.

An answer that a Libertarian might say is that those are not true objections to Libertarians, because it addresses more towards that humans can create their own actions based on the human experience and not that we can be in control over every aspect of our lives. This can then be answered by stating that some deterministic values in our genetics do affect our ability to be agents in our society. Consider epigenetics, some may believe that genes are only deterministic. Gene expression can be deterministic because genes are inherited and show determinism, however, epigenetics offers insights into this thought. How, when, and even if genes are expressed can be influenced by our decisions such as diet and activity.

While this may seem like another simple solution for the response to the objection, it is a strong one because with the Libertarian approach you need to prove that humans can be the causes of action across the board, and it does not. Making a bunch of exceptions to the rule follows the fallacy of exceptions in which you can make a bunch of exceptions saying that the libertarian approach does not hold up. Because of this we should reject the Libertarian approach in favor of one that does not allow exceptions to the rule. Compatibilism solves this concern because it shows that we do have some determined aspects in our biology but some aspects that are not determined and that other factors are in play. Looking at epigenetics for example, if you look at identical twins, they share the same DNA but because of their experiences and nurture, genetics show differently. Epigenetics gives insight that human influence can change our gene expression, such as one twin getting cancer because they smoke and the other can live on healthily. Shows that even with some determined aspects in our lives some indeterminacies are also in effect such as someone getting diabetes for consuming too much sugar. Following a

compatibilist approach to our understanding of biology provides a clear understanding of our biology and following Ockham's Razor which is that the simplest conclusion is most likely true. Because if you go for incompatibilism you would have to prove why it seems we have free will and have a reason or explanation how every human event has been predetermined causing confusion in its reasoning; and the same can be applied to libertarians.

The second concern can be mostly seen by incompatibilist in which do not have a strong enough understanding of our human experiences. While incompatibilist have tried to use science in proving that determinism is true and that we do not have free will, as discussed previously, it seems difficult to prove determinism's existence. Since it is difficult to try and prove determinism, the better question to approach is if we should believe the truth of determinism. As other philosophers have touched upon, whether you believe in determinism or free will, it does impact your behavior (Duus-otterström, 2008; Nichols & Knobe, 2007). With a deterministic view point it would have to explain why someone committed the crime, and the action must have been predetermined by past events, taking responsibility from the person. I believe that this point misses the mark to explain why emotion of human behavior are necessary for human function. When looking at human function in determinism it doesn't explain why we have emotions when we do something. For example, anger can be a driving force for our actions with our emotions. In a determinist it fails to correspond emotions on human behavior in leading to actions. If everything was determined, then the world would run with emotionless humans committing crimes and getting away without consequences because they are forced to.

While people can say that under determinism people can face punishment because it was predetermined to happen, the response is that we do not have a justified reason for punishment. When you look at punishment you are under the basis that the individual deserved punishment

for that crime (morally). Under determinism people committing crimes are not held responsible because they are forced to do so. Ponder this example, you have two people, person A is forced to kill someone because they are held at gunpoint and person B kills someone because they want to. If you can only punish one person, most if not all would say that person B should get punished. The question is why? It is because it seems as though that person is deserving of punishment, when you evaluate punishment, you also evaluate it on a moral basis and under determinism people do not have a moral baseline because they are determined to commit certain actions. So, under determinism, punishment is seen as pointless to society besides a method of torturing people.

On the other hand, when taking the same analogy and applying it to compatibilism it explains why human behavior and moral responsibility are so intertwined in society. Compatibilism applies the notion that our emotions can drive us because determinism is based on previous actions, but it does not imply any barriers or premises that the past is constant. This means that different events would arise leading to different outcomes. A compatibilist route would look at the events that lead to a predetermined route, such as the example of killing, the past events that happened on the agent would lead to change on human behavior which leads to killing. The agents still can act which gives them the chance to change their actions which consequently change the past of those predetermined events. The idea of a free agent having the ability to change emotions and act freely on their own accord proves someone can control their emotions or why someone can be punished for their crimes. The ability of a free acting person to act upon emotions necessitates the ability that people can act freely since in a general sense people have different avenues of expressing emotions.

A compatibilist approach would explain why we have human behavior and why we are able to express those behaviors differently because we can act on those changes that supersede past events. To make it clear it doesn't make sense to say that a person's actions affect the past but rather that the actions in the present are based on past instances. The actions that have been made were caused by you as an individual based on desires rather than an uncontrollable force that makes you decide. This means that the responsibility of an agent committing a crime is based on her will to act on her desires over being controlled by some unknown force. It can still mean that you commit a crime (which is determined) but your actions as a free individual and the route to take leads to the predetermined route over a force making you commit the crime.

When considering determinism, it states that the events of a person's actions are made up from previous events that lead to a path already made for a person. When thinking this I found it hard to believe that it explains why people make different decisions based on upbringing. An agent doing certain actions such as having children not only rely on an individual's thoughts but also it has to do with other factors. This includes social factors (such as finances, upbringing, etc) as well as biological factors (such as health, size etc) and more. I think stating that it was all predetermined relies heavily on the assumption that people lack impulse or desire. The very principle of people having different experiences shows the illogical route of having the assumption that everything being written down is being followed. For example, think about people who act on impulse based on experiences extreme emotions such as anger or sadness. It seems unlikely to state these events have been predetermined nor is there sufficient evidence proving determinism. You can also say that different subjective experiences to the same reality can have different reactions to it. One can argue that the difficulty of pinpointing determinism instead of indeterminacy could all be a toll of determinants happening in low probable events. By

stating this it undermines the whole point of determinism because it would follow the multiple outcomes of something happening which gives way to things having a choice in actions. This goes to undermine the point of determinism in saying that probabilities do not matter because there is only one event that is going to happen, and other events are illusionary nonsense. While undermining determinism it goes to support compatibilist approach because it shows a game of probabilities and the actions/experiences/emotions that we have strengthen one of the possible predetermined events to occur based on the conditions chosen/followed.

Another concept with compatibilism is the feeling of free will, which shows how we rationalize things. If we are put in a situation in which we rationalize our actions to come up with a solution, it could be argued that self-reflection opens avenues of us being a free agent. If we reflect three possible outcomes to an imaginary situation, it makes way to show that there are still possible actions to be made. It could be explained that determinism creates our rationalization coming from a determined thought process. I think that this would not make sense because then it would mean that determinism must be determined which brings into question the value of something already being presupposed. In addition, since the evidence of showing that determinism is true is very limited or nonexistent the best possible solution is to answer if we should believe in free will and I say yes. From experimental philosophy it shows that people can change behavior when believing in determinism which shows individuals act more irrational, meaning that if someone people can commit more crimes because they would not feel morally responsible for the crimes that they have committed. In other words, one's beliefs about determinism influence one's actions. So, when it comes to the evidence of determinism it comes down if we should believe in determinism and when we do believe in it can make us irrational in



our decision but also acknowledges that believing in free will is better for understanding the human experience.

This leads to the conclusion that determinism is a concept of illusive reasoning and conclusions that say everything in our lives are determined but that makes it unintelligible because it shows that determinism is a product and not the processor of events. This means that when I think that a compatibilist approach solves the problem because when it comes to our ability to act on our reflections, which shows the fine line that a predetermined event can happen through the choices that we have meaning that we can free but lead to a predetermined event. So overall when considering compatibilism, I believe that it explains society and human behavior better than an incompatibilists and libertarian view because they fail to analyze our current understanding of society and that biological understanding. As well as determinism fails to understand certain events that happen within humans in nature such as indeterminacy failing to rationalize human reflection or by their own rationalization prove a probability question favoring compatibilism.

### **What Implications does Gender Identity have for Determinism?**

#### **Understanding Personal Identity – General implications of Gender identity.**

When considering personal identity, the primary task is figuring out what the self is and what conditions make this genuine (Hittinger, 1990). Since there are a profound number of disciplines that view identity in a variety of ways, they tend to split it into different sub-disciplines. Because of the sub-disciplines of personal identity are made, philosophers ask the question about those sub-disciplines, such as biological identity, racial/ethnic identity, gender

identity, economic, and more. And within these different sub-disciplines they have different stances of what makes the individual (the self). One of the biggest concerns about personal identity is trying to figure out if we are continuously the same at different times (Hittinger, 1990; Sauchelli, 2017). Personal identity arises when considering if we are genuinely ourselves (Christy et al., 2019). Since people change throughout their lifetime, it is fair to consider how a person changes within their personality and identity to quantify what personal identity is. For example, an individual in their teens may act different once they enter college or when they become an adult, while another individual will have the same personality and identity throughout their lives. Major questions when relating to identity are, how do we measure/quantify personal identity through time and space, what characterizations create identity, and what evidence can we provide to prove identity (Hittinger, 1990; Sauchelli, 2017)? When evaluating personal identity, different methods can be used to state that a particular condition is part of their identity while trying to answer the main questions to understand the self.

While the debate about personal identity is vast, with different responses and interpretations to declare what 'the self' is, these papers will focus on gender identity, specifically free will's connection to the concept of gender identity. Gender identity would be defined as how an individual identifies their gender. The literature offers two main gender identity perspectives: the feminist perspective and the queer theory perspective. The following sections will show the main principles that each perspective defines 'gender identity'.

### **The Feminist Perspective - Biological Determinism and Social Construct Theory**

When considering the early works of gender identity, it was first coined by psychiatrists when considering what type of sex, a person associates with, such as a male or female (Byrne, 2023). When considering the work associated with gender identity, feminists have considered

different approaches to classifying gender. One such perspective is biological determinism, meaning biological factors determine gender identity (Byrne, 2023; Dembroff, 2018; Dixon, 1992). Other perspectives have argued that social factors created gender identity (Byrne, 2023; Butler, 1990; Dembroff, 2018; Dixon, 1992). Those social factors, such as masculine or feminine traits, are imposed onto children based on their biological sex (Butler, 1990). Whichever perspective with the feminist approach, it is vital to note that many argue that there are problems when classifying gender identity because it assumes presence or continuity (Dixon, 1992). The problem with the assumption is that an individual is always changing, whether it be physically or internally. That becomes a problem because an individual cannot claim continuity or presence because if it is constantly changing there is no continuity or presence of those factors that can define an individual's gender identity. Others have also pointed out that gender specification within literature can be self-defeating because it excludes groups of individuals that may not meet specific specifications to classify them in a group (Dembroff, 2022).

The arguments defining what gender identity is, the criticisms seem to be redundant. Considering that humans constantly change thoughts, emotions, and behavior when approaching continuity, it seems to disprove that someone's gender identity is continuous. An example of this is that humans change throughout their lives, from infancy till when they are old, things such as height, weight, opinions, appearance, education, and more change throughout life. But because of the continuous change there seems to be no clear way for an individual to have something continuous. Which is why the feminist perspective says that gender identity comes from either biology (such as DNA) or through social factors (like patriarchy). Because of these responses, most of the criticisms brought onto this perspective seem to have objections that strawman the argument for a perspective of gender identity. Meaning that the arguments seem to be minor

problems in explaining what gender identity is because it is obvious that humans change over time such as height, weight, appearance, and more but the question now becomes what can be used to show continuity, which brings in other questions in which the feminist perspective and queer perspective will try to figure this question out.

When evaluating the claims of the feminist perspective I will be looking at how the determinism debate relates to each perspective and what we can get out of it. When considering the biological deterministic aspect, it seems to follow a more deterministic approach of identity, which your biology has predetermined your gender identity. The concern now is what does this approach say about identity and the concerns that philosophers have. The first concern is continuity between time and space. Biological determinism seems to answer this concern because from the moment that you born your identity has already been placed on you through space and time. The next concern would be if biological determinism would be true. When looking at biological determinism, it views gender as a binary in which people are assigned their gender in which it seems difficult to believe that your sex creates your gender. There are two concerns that I have with this approach is that gender and sex are not a binary, when considering sex and viewing it as binary is wrong because of individuals who are intersex. Individuals who are intersex fall out of the binary, so it shows that you cannot view sex through a binary and the same can be said when it comes to gender. Binary views of gender fail because people do not fall under one specific gender binary, human experiences show that humans have some sort of uniqueness when it comes to their gender in which people can display some masculine and feminine traits. When evaluating biological determinism, we can see examples in which some things may be seen as deterministic while other points seem to be undetermined. For example, when looking at epigenetics you can see that your biology may be determined, but the way

genetics are displayed seems indeterministic based on your nurture. When looking at biological determinism you can still use it to show a compatibilist approach in which not everything biological is set and stone, even at a biological level decisions and environmental factors continue to influence outcomes throughout life in different ways. What we can take out of biological determinism is that there seems to be a compatible approach to how we evaluate gender in which some things such as your sex can be determined but the way that you present your gender can be indeterministic which follows the next theory, social construct theory.

When evaluating social construct theory, it states that society and the institutions held in place make your gender. So, institutions will assign you masculine and feminine stereotypes/gender roles to play based on the sex that you were born with. Then because of those gender roles placed on you at an early age you tend to express those roles causing your gender identity. This approach seems to answer the continuity question as well of your identity because even though your gender roles change over time as you grow up, you continue to express the genders assigned to you at birth, showing continuity. A concern when it comes to social construct theory is that people break those roles or reject them entirely. For example, a transgender person or a non-binary person will reject the gender roles placed on them and exhibit other roles. When looking at gender identity, the example above shows that continuity can break up into different sections, in which they can continue to reject roles placed on them at birth, accept the ones given at birth, or accept other roles not assigned to them. This social construct theory can also be valued by a compatibilist approach because it shows that we as humans have inherent choice in the ways that we evaluate gender, which incompatibilists and libertarians fail to approach. Incompatibilists and Libertarians fail because while some aspects of one's gender may be deterministic (DNA), there are also undetermined aspects as well (rejection or

acceptance of gender roles). When looking at the two main theories of gender identity, the feminist perspective brings in two models the biological and social construct theory of gender identity, it seems as though they both show a more compatibilist stance when exploring gender identity. The next section looks at another prominent theory of gender identity which is the queer theory perspective of gender identity.

### **The Queer Theory Perspective – Performativity of Gender.**

The evolution of the feminist perspective, a different branch emerged: the queer theory perspective on gender identity. Most of the work on the queer theory perspective argues for a more fluid approach to gender identity. While Butler has added to the feminist approach to the social construction of gender, she also notes that gender is performative (Butler, 1990). By performance, Butler describes it as an act of doing a performance, that people act or perform their gender through social constructions of the types of gender (Butler, 1990). When looking at performance, Butler goes on to state that the performance of gender is fluid because of social traits affecting the individual, such as what behaviors are expected from the individual, patriarchy, gender stereotypes, and more (Butler, 1990). Comparing the queer perspective with the feminist perspective you can see some similarities and differences. The performativity of gender contrasts with biological determinism (feminist perspective) because biological determinism states that biology dictates gender and the queer perspective states that it is dependent on the individual performance. In contrast other feminist literature states that social factors determine gender identity, it differs from the queer perspective in that the queer perspective states that their gender identity is performed in response to these social factors and that it is fluid through time. The feminist perspective makes a point that the social factors that create someone's gender identity tend to be rigid with little to change over time (Bryne, 2023;

Buttler, 1990). When approaching fluidity, some queer theorists argue that the performance of gender binaries is within the person's own volition (Ozturk, 2018). However, because of this binary many have opposed these values because if gender identity is the performance of our desire, then the philosophical implementation of identity seems nonexistent (Ben Hagai & Zurbriggen, 2022; Nagoshi et al., 2014; Ozturk, 2018). This is because in philosophy, we state that identity needs to have presence and continuity, but if gender is performative and can be performed whenever, there is a loss in continuity or presence because it can be changed quickly. Whether identity is true to an individual, there must be evidence proving its existence and whether it has substance. So, if one's desire can change, then that means that gender identity is not substantial enough to influence an individual's identity. Because it lacks substance, it shows that gender identity is not stand alone but may be influenced by other unknown identities, whether biological or social. An example of this loss of gender identity is looking at transgender individuals who reject the gender and sex assigned to them at birth which shows from the social construct theory that gender that it has some indeterministic aspects associated to it. The answer from the continuity question can be seen when people either reject those roles placed on them or accept other roles, they do it over a period. Also showing your gender identity to others is not the only way to show continuity. Having a particular gender identity mentally or internally could be another way to show continuity. This can mean that people who are transgender but can start transitioning later in life but knew of their identity before their transition. This can answer the continuity question because even though the identity is not explicit, it is still there because gender identity is not about showing it explicitly but how an individual identifies their gender.

When exploring the various ways in which gender identity is defined it shows that feminist theories and queer theory support a more compatibilist view of gender identity and that

libertarianism and determinism fall short in explaining our gender identity. Our gender identity seems to be compatible to determinism because each perspective discusses that our biology can determine the way that we view gender and go insofar to say that our location and time do the same as well. But there is an indeterministic view of gender such as the way that we accept or reject gender roles and how we perform it can show that gender can also not be determined and that there is a compatible approach in exploring gender identity.

### **How Gender Identity Can Be Used as Evidence for Compatibilism**

When looking at the previous sections I have argued that compatibilism is the best way of viewing the determinism and free will debate because it answers concerns presented in Libertarians and Determinists. Then when intersecting the determinism debate to the gender identity debate, I argued that these approaches of gender identity tend to follow a more compatibilist approach to gender identity. If we accept a more compatibilist approach to gender, then it can explain why people are inherently different when it comes to gender identity. Not only can we use gender identity to show that people are different, but the application of identity can show that our current understanding of society and in turn the world show some level of compatibilism. As mentioned in the previous sections of possible evidence for determinism, we don't have concrete scientific evidence to prove hard determinism or libertarians, but it can be used to explain some version of compatibilism. Then when looking at gender identity all three perspectives of gender presented in this paper can show that gender is compatible in which some aspects of our gender are determined but also has some undetermined aspects as well. When looking at the implications of gender identity to show compatibilism of determinism and free will some objections do arise. I will mention a possible objection to my argument and go to



explain the reasoning of the argument and say why they cannot disprove how gender can be seen to support compatibilism.

The first objection would be that my argument heavily relies on the human experience to show compatibilism, especially with the application of gender identity. If you accept this version of a compatibilist approach, an argument made is that emotions can all be a part of a determinism, that it is determined that you feel those emotions and the reflection of those emotions can be considered determined and illusorily to the actual human experience. When looking at determinism and how it affects emotions it can be argued that each action that has happened in a sequence is determined and our perception of will is all but illusory. Pondering this idea, it seems as though when looking at events it seems to be events and actions are exclusive of one another and that they do not interact. I find this idea hard to believe that the human experience can be determined and that it is outside to fully interact with actions that are also determined. For example, consider these two cases:

1. Jeff (A) is being assaulted and kills someone to avoid the harm that would be done to him.
2. Jeff (B) is a psychopath and kills someone because it brings joy to him.

When considering these two cases a hard determinist would say that both are the same because they are both determined to kill someone and that the emotions or the experiences of the two cases do not matter. When you consider these two cases your intuition says that they are different; the question now is why we have this intuition. The answer is that it highlights the importance of the human experience when we look at events. Because of the importance of the human experience, it can give reason if the latter is true (that emotions are determined, and that human experience is determined as well) it seems to be unlikely to explain why we value human

behavior. When going back to the section about the evidence for determinism each of the evidence for determinism tend to reach a more compatible. When looking at the Libet experiment and looking specifically looking at the human experience, it seems difficult to pinpoint conscious decisions nor is it able to pinpoint why behavior and actions that a human has is predetermined. When we look at experimental philosophy it also seems to follow the importance of the human experience in which it shows that human emotions can be a contributing factor to actions happening which can show some level of indeterminacy. In light of this, think of this example specific to gender; given a person named Billy, they do not accept the gender identity given to them upon birth and take on a different gender role. A hard determinist would say that Billy was determined to reject those gender roles in favor of a new one. But when you consider this, it seems lacking, because the reason one would change their gender identity would be because of experiences that they felt, and a hard determinist would say that it would not matter. Consider this argument in light of Billy's situation under determinism:

1. If determinism is true, every action has been predetermined.
2. Billy rejects notions of gender reinforced to them by space and time.
3. Determinism holds that Billy was predetermined to reject gender norms.
4. Therefore, determinism predetermined Billy's gender.

When considering the argument above there are concerns that premises two and three are correct. When looking at gender identity and examples of people rejecting their given gender identity, they point to the importance of the human experience to show that while some things they cannot change about themselves is true, experiences can have a say as to how one evaluates their gender identity overall. They also tend to fail to show or explain the complexities of gender identity in relation to society, that people can face stigma, stereotypes, etc. Consider social pressures for

Billy to accept socially accepted gender norms. Even though it is difficult for Billy to reject the norms placed on them, Billy still rejects them. It seems apparent that other factors are in play that could influence Billy to reject those norms. It would have been easier to accept the norms from the beginning, but Billy did not. A hard determinist would say that all of this was predetermined to happen and caused Billy to have a reaction to rejecting those norms (the reactions are also determined). But this does not seem to explain the complexities of behavior because Billy could be capable of doing other actions such as rejecting their true self, hiding their identity, lying to himself, etc. Determinism seems to put everything on par and say that they are the same, consider Thomas (A) is flies a plane even though Thomas is anxious to fly it, over Thomas (B) flying a plane with no anxiety. If hard determinism is true, then the weight of both claims is the same, but we feel as though the experiences are different. This seems to show that some level of the human experience is important in showing some level of humans creating actions. Now, consider a compatibilist approach to Billy's gender:

1. If compatibilism is true, there must be sufficient reason to believe in free will.
2. Scientific evidence or philosophical reasoning show our time, space, and biology have been predetermined.
3. Scientific evidence and philosophical reasoning have shown that behavior and identities can be undetermined.
4. Our understanding of gender shows that there are predetermined and undetermined aspects of gender identity.
5. Therefore, our gender identity is compatible with compatibility.

While one can consider that this is more detailed than the previous argument, the evidence shows that although there are some things that are determined and outside of our control, other

aspects of our experiences do not seem to be determined. So, the evidence that we do have can show that the world is semi-determined with having some indeterminacy. Applying this argument to Billy, it can explain why Billy would reject their gender identity in which their gender identity reinforced to them growing up is determined, but the experience that Billy has can give reason as to why they would reject it. This seems a more logical conclusion over trying to say that all actions related to Billy are determined, because you would need evidence to show that without Billy's experience, they would still have the same outcome, but it does not explain the uniqueness of the human experience when it comes to identity.

Overall, when looking at gender identity, it can show some level of compatibilism. While, we may have concerns about the importance of the human experience to show compatibilism, there is not enough reason to say that the human experience is not important. Some may argue that our evaluation of the human experience can all be an illusion, the response to this is that we as humans already value importance to the human experience and there is not sufficient reason to reject the notion that the human experience is not important to the determinism debate. Because of this idea of human experience it can be applied to gender identity in which we can apply gender identity to show some level of compatibilism, such as the gender identity reinforced to you at birth could be determined as seen through feminist and queer theory but they can also be not determined because our experiences can change our identity in which we can accept, reject, or change the roles assigned to us.

### **Conclusion**

When evaluating the determinism and free will debate, there is a lot to consider. First this paper looked at explaining the different approaches to the determinism debate. The main theories

approached in this paper is looking at hard determinism and compatibilism, with some mentions to libertarianism. When it comes to proving either side, philosophers have tried to look for evidence to prove their side. Robert Sapolsky and Libet experiments have been used to prove that our world is determined, but the reasoning of these two sources to be evidence for determinism seem to fail. At most, the evidence presented in these two areas can prove for compatibilism. When looking at experimental philosophy, it gives sufficient reasoning to show compatibilism by highlighting the importance of human behavior and how people tend to follow a more compatible approach. While experimental philosophy may have some inconsistent results, it is important to know that people can change their behavior based on the context of the scenario. Overall, each piece of evidence for determinism seems to show more of a compatible approach towards the determinism debate.

When looking at gender identity as evidence for compatibilism, you can see gender identity as a piece of evidence to show compatibilism. When looking at feminist theory (biological determinism and social construct theory) and queer theory (performativity) each show that there are some things that are determined with our gender identity and other aspects that are not determined. Our current understanding of gender identity can show that compatibilism is the best answer to see if our world is determined. Gender identity highlights the importance of the human experience, which hard determinism fails to answer. The evidence that we do have in this debate strongly supports the connection between compatibilism and gender identity. While some hard determinists have concerns with using the human experience as evidence because it can be an illusion made by a determined world, the justification and the evidence are not strong enough to reject a compatibilist view. Conclusively, when looking at the

intersection of determinism and free will to gender identity, you can use gender identity as evidence for compatibilism.

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