

Logan Carter

[Word Count: 1684]

Deliberating Deliberative Libertarian Views

Introduction

In this paper, I'll present two objections against Robert Kane's (2024) libertarian account. First, to accommodate deliberative libertarian views, Kane must reconceptualize how indeterminism operates in deliberation. Second, in light of a discussion concerning the time indeterminism terminates in deliberation, we do not have good reason to prefer Kane's account over deliberative views. I leave it open as to which view *better* captures libertarian free will. I only wish to show that deliberative views are no less plausible than Kane's account.

Kane's Conception of Indeterminism

For libertarians, indeterminism is a necessary condition for free will. One piece of the puzzle for libertarians is to describe how and when indeterminism issues in an agent's deliberation process.

Here's what Kane has in mind for *how* indeterminism issues in deliberation. Kane contends that indeterminism is "stirred up" when there is a conflict in an agent's will, such as uncertainty about what to do (63). Put more formally, a conflict in one's will is "reflected in some indeterminacy in our neural processes" (Kane, 61). However, it is a mistake to think of

indeterminism as a cause. Rather, Kane characterizes indeterminism as an “*ingredient* in larger *goal-directed* or *teleological* activities of the agent, in which the indeterminism functions as a *hindrance* or *interfering* element in the attainment of their goals” (original italics, 66). Actions that settle the conflict in the will are what Kane calls “self-forming actions” (SFAs). SFAs are the only kinds of actions that must themselves be undetermined (Kane, 23). So, indeterminism must be present when the agent performs an SFA.

Deliberative Views

Deliberative views place indeterminism early in the deliberation process and, crucially, *do not* require indeterminism at the time of final choice or action. This is one way out of the libertarian dilemma, which is the charge that if a choice or action is undetermined, then its occurrence is a mere matter of chance. On these views, indeterminism is responsible for generating the coming-to-mind of various considerations, beliefs, or desires (Kane, 115). The reasons that emerge from this undetermined comings-to-mind then assist the agent in forming an evaluative judgment. Some deliberative views hold that the link between evaluative judgment formation and the subsequent choice is consistent with a compatibilist sense of freedom, such that there may be deterministic causation of the subsequent choice, though not necessarily so.

It is worth noting that deliberative views have many of the important features that Kane thinks make for an adequate libertarian account. For example, deliberative views have most of the ‘will-forming’ characteristics as Kane’s view. An agent’s forming *this* evaluative judgment over another importantly shapes her character; she shapes her character insofar as she becomes the type of person that would form *this* evaluative judgment over another, based on reasons that emerge from undetermined comings-to-mind.

Example

Consider the following example. John is running late for an important job interview. On his way to the interview, on foot, John spots an elderly woman who needs assistance crossing the street. Suppose that John is unsure what to do and that he must decide quickly – this will matter later – lest he miss the interview. Suppose further that an undetermined coming-to-mind of a memory with his loving grandma pops into his head. John thinks to himself that, if it were his grandma, he would want somebody to help. In other words, John forms the evaluative judgment that what is best for him to do is help the lady. So, John decides to help the old lady cross the street.

In this example, the undetermined coming-to-mind of John's grandma *helped* John form the evaluative judgment about what best to do, namely, to help the old lady. In other words, *without* the undetermined coming-to-mind of John's grandma, John may not have helped the old lady cross the street. What can be drawn from this example is that indeterminism can occur in the early stages of deliberation in a way that *assists* or *facilitates* the success of an agent's goal-directed activities.

Objection

There are different conceptions of indeterminism at play in the two views just considered. On the one hand, deliberative views hold that indeterminism issues early in deliberation in the generation of various considerations that can, in some cases (such as John's), *assist or facilitate* the success of goal-driven activities. On the other hand, Kane holds that indeterminism acts as a *hindrance or interference* in the success of goal-driven activities.

The objection here is that Kane must be more flexible in his conception of indeterminism if he is to accommodate deliberative views. This point may seem moot, but Kane does think that a “full picture” of libertarian free will can be achieved when an account of SFAs (like his) is added to deliberative accounts (113). And if deliberative accounts allow for undetermined comings-to-mind to help in forming evaluative judgments, then, for adequate accommodation, so should Kane. It is also important to get the details of indeterminism straight, especially since it is required for libertarian accounts.

Kane’s Response

One way Kane might respond to the objection is to concede that his conception of indeterminism is too narrow to accommodate deliberative views. Thus, Kane could grant that indeterminism can sometimes, in the early stages of deliberation, facilitate the success of goal-driven activities. In revisiting deliberative accounts, Kane seems to make this exact move: “[t]he reasons that emerge from the [undetermined] comings-to-mind...may incline the agent to form one of these evaluative judgments rather than another, but they only *incline*” (123). What undetermined considerations do *not* do, Kane would argue, is determine the agent’s subsequent choice. In other words, an adequate libertarian account would not allow (as some deliberative accounts do) for determinism to kick in, so to speak, after an evaluative judgment is formed.

Response to the Response

But this begs the question against deliberative views. It is a feature of deliberative views that indeterminism need not be required at the end of deliberation and that the link between evaluative judgment formation and the subsequent choice is consistent with a compatibilist kind of freedom (though this is not necessarily the case). Proponents of deliberative views insist that

determinism only be required in the early stages of deliberation, and for good reason, namely, to avoid the libertarian dilemma. To insist that indeterminism be required at the time of final choice or action, as Kane does, simply re-instantiates the libertarian dilemma.

Question-begging aside, one might wonder why it would be problematic for deliberative views to allow for a compatibilist kind of freedom in the late stages of deliberation. The typical libertarian worry about determinism is that freedom would be threatened if the laws of nature were set at the Big Bang such that there is only one way that things can go. And this seems to be the determinism that Kane is worried about. But this is not the determinism that deliberative views have in mind. In this picture, it is the agent's formation of an evaluative judgment, and *not* the conditions at the beginning of the universe, that (may) determine their subsequent choice. Note, further, that deliberative views are *not* arguing that the link between evaluative judgment formation and the subsequent choice is *necessarily* deterministic; rather, it is compatible with their account that deterministic causation be involved in those stages of deliberation.

Timing

The crucial distinction between the two views on the table, I think, boils down to *when* indeterminism terminates in the deliberation process. Deliberative views hold that indeterminism terminates early in the deliberation process, namely, at the time at which an evaluative judgment is formed. Kane contends that indeterminism must be present at the time of final choice or action (though it could be issued earlier in deliberation, too). What difference does the *timing* of indeterminism entering the deliberation process make?

Consider John once again. Since he was running late to his interview, John had to make a prompt decision about what to do. The undetermined coming-to-mind of his grandma gave him

a reason to help the lady, and it is based on this reason that he formed the evaluative judgment that he should help the lady. Suppose that the time difference between his forming the evaluative judgment and his deciding to help the lady is two seconds (which is likely generous given how quickly neural processes are executed). Given the current case, deliberative views would have it that indeterminism terminates just two seconds before Kane would have indeterminism terminating.

If we are to accept Kane's picture over deliberative views, he would have to argue that this time difference *makes all the difference* when it comes to freedom. I imagine that his argument would likely appeal, again, to the idea that indeterminism simply *must* be required at the time of final choice or action if we are to have a full picture of libertarian freedom. Not only is this argument question-begging against deliberative views, as discussed earlier, but it is not independently convincing. That is, it does not point to anything important happening in those two seconds, other than indeterminism being present in those last two seconds, such freedom emerges. But this, of course, will not satisfy deliberative views for reasons already considered.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented two objections to Kane's (2024) libertarian account of free will. First, to appropriately accommodate deliberative views, Kane must reconceptualize how indeterminism operates in deliberation. We saw that Kane would indeed grant that indeterminism can assist agents in their goal-directed activities insofar as reasons to form evaluative judgments can emerge from the generation of undetermined considerations, or comings-to-mind. The second objection was that we do not have good reason to prefer Kane's view over deliberative views. This is because, aside from question-begging, there appears to be no difference between the views other than the time at which indeterminism terminates in deliberation. Since Kane does not point to any 'freedom-making' difference

occurring in the time between evaluative judgment formation and subsequent choice, other than their being indeterminism (which is question-begging), we do not have good reason to prefer his account to deliberative views.

Works Cited

1. Kane, Robert. *The Complex Tapestry of Free Will: A Philosophical Odyssey*. Oxford University Press, 2024.