

Libertarianism about Free Will  
Notes on Daniel C. Dennett, *Freedom  
Evolves*, chapter 4

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## 1 Possible Views - An Overview

	Determinism is true	Determinism is false
Compatibilism	soft determinism	no name
Incompatibilism	hard determinism	libertarianism

## 2 Arguments against Libertarianism

1. Randomness only seems to help in “liberty of indifference” cases (125)
2. Real randomness doesn’t get you anything you couldn’t get with pseudo-randomness
3. There’s no way to tell when real randomness does or doesn’t obtain (but we need to be able to tell when someone is morally responsible for his or her actions) (131ff)
4. Randomness seems incompatible with being in control (123)
5. Determined but free: (a) snap decisions (115-116); (b) Luther (“I can do no other,” 117)

### 3 The Size of the Self

Dennett: "If you make yourself really small, you can externalize virtually everything" (p. 122).

#### Synchronic spread of the self:

Kant: self = will

Hume: self = will + beliefs, desires

Aristotle: self = will + beliefs, desires + habits, dispositions

#### Diachronic spread of the self:

If my current actions are determined by my prior choices, is that determination from the outside or determination by me?

#### The Prime Mammal Argument

1. Every mammal has a mammal for a mother.
2. There have been at most finitely many mammals.
3. Suppose (for reductio) that there is a mammal.
- ∴ 4. There are infinitely many mammals. (from 1, 3)
5. Contradiction! (4, 2)
- ∴ 6. There are no mammals. (3-5, reductio ad absurdum)

#### The Incompatibilist Argument

1. Every action that is up to me must be caused by something that is up to me.
2. Things that happened before my birth were not up to me.
3. Suppose (for reductio) that there is an action that is up to me.
- ∴ 4. Things that happened before my birth were up to me (from 1, 3)
5. Contradiction! (4, 2)
- ∴ 6. There are no actions that are up to me. (3-5, reductio ad absurdum)

## 4 Responses to the Arguments

### **The wrong way, on Dennett's view:**

Premise 1 is false because there is a “prime mammal,” i.e. a mammal without a mammal for a mother. (Either because God created the first mammal, or because there was a decisive mutation such that mother wasn't a mammal but baby was.)

Similarly, the wrong reply to the second argument would be: premise 1 is false because there is a “prime action,” an action that is up to me but wasn't caused by anything that was up to me. (Either because it wasn't caused at all, or because there was a decisive break between a not-up-to-me event and an up-to-me event.)

### **The right way, on Dennett's view:**

“Mammal” is a vague concept. If we consider a range of transitional forms, there will be no decisive point at which one is not a mammal and the next one is. Nevertheless there are clear cases of mammals, and clear cases of mammal-ancestors that are not mammals.

Similarly, “up to me” is a vague concept. At some point in the history of causal antecedents of my actions, we hit events that are clearly not up to me, but there is no precise point at which this occurs.