

## COMPATIBILISM AND THE POSSIBILITY OF ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS

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### Abstract

*The question of freedom of human action within the causal necessity of the physical world involves intense philosophical debate. Freedom of action is believed to be an uncaused freedom in so far as it involves accountability of an individual's voluntary deeds. However, given that all the events in nature are causally necessitated by other physical events, it is hard to defend an uncaused freedom of action. Compatibilism attempts to reconcile freedom and causation by projecting the idea of an unconstrained freedom while rejection the idea of an uncaused freedom. Thus, the compatibilist philosophers contend that our deliberations and ensuing actions are free even if they are caused by external events, as far as we can act as we want. In case we act against our wants, in a constrained or compelled situation, we may not be free. However, freedom within the causal necessity seems impossible. For, even where one may willingly act as one wants, without constraint, the chain of causality may render it necessitated, and thus predictable. Thus, freedom to act as one wants further requires 'freedom to act otherwise than what one wants'. So, we are back to the age old dilemma of an uncaused freedom against the causal necessity of physical nature! If one could not have acted otherwise than what one did, there is no distinction left between constrained and unconstrained actions. Thus, the possibility of 'acting otherwise' by 'thinking otherwise' without being caused to do so by factors beyond reason, is the prerogative of a rational agent, without which actions are indistinguishable from natural events.*

**Key words:** *Compatibilism, Freedom, Determinism, Predictability, Reason, Action, Will, Want, Desire, Cause, Causation, Causal nexus, Causal necessity, Consciousness, Self-consciousness, Agent, Rational agent, Physical events, Compulsion, Constraint, Deliberations*

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Philosophers finding the idea of an *uncaused freedom* of action unacceptable, or who think neither determinism nor freedom can be rejected, defend *compatibilism*. Compatibilism is primarily the thesis that all human actions are *caused*, yet *one is free to act as one wants*, insofar as one does not act against one's desires. In other words, compatibilism holds that one's actions are free as long as one can act as one wants, despite their contention that all desires are causally determined. On the other hand, the *incompatibilists* believe that freedom of action requires *freedom from causality*. For the incompatibilist, any form of compatibilism that reconciles freedom with a deterministic worldview is inconsistent or contradictory.<sup>1</sup> The contradiction of compatibilism lies in that whereas all desires are believed to be caused, the *practical reasoning* involved in deciding or choosing is taken as free. The distinction between practical reasoning and theoretical reasoning derives from the general difference between explanation of actions and natural phenomena. Whereas practical reasoning involves means–ends relation for doing something, theoretical reasoning involves knowledge of causal relations between different parts of nature. The latter, however, requires further that the particular causal relations be subsumed under general laws of nature. On the other hand, practical reasoning primarily connects one's beliefs, desires, wants and intentions with their objects for possible fulfillment through certain means. Here the point is that practical reasoning itself does not aim at law-like generalizations. Its exercise may involve knowledge of general laws but with the aim of achieving a desired end.

Moreover, though it is not clear whether all reasoning is caused by factors beyond consciousness, still the act of thinking about certain means for certain desired ends is not something that just happens to an agent's mind, such that he might be said to *discover* or find himself engaged in it. Rather, the agent's *consciousness* of the means for certain ends involves, in addition, his own *awareness*, as a subject, that he wants to search for some possible courses of actions to fulfill certain desired ends. It further involves the agent's belief that doing X would satisfactorily lead him in achieving the desired end Y. Keeping this distinction in focus, Kenny's account of freedom is examined under the problem of compatibility or incompatibility of freedom with determinism.

### Kenny on Compatibilism

For Kenny the compatibility problem is not as simple as most of the compatibilists assume. The compatibilist only reconciles the 'liberty of spontaneity' with determinism. Thus one is free to do what one wants to do even if determinism is true, provided one is not compelled to do so. However, Kenny thinks that for compatibilism to be true, liberty of indifference, that is, *the freedom or power to act otherwise*, should also be reconciled with determinism.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Kenny contends that, "...any viable form of determinism

<sup>1</sup> Incompatibilists may defend either determinism or freedom, or may simply argue that both cannot be true at the same time, without committing themselves to either determinism or freedom.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Will, Freedom, and Power*, Oxford: Basil and Blackwell. 1975. P.146. (Liberty of spontaneity' and liberty of indifference' are David Hume's distinctions, adopted by Kenny, between 'freedom to act as one wants and freedom to act otherwise than what one actually does' respectively. The compatibilists defend the 'liberty of spontaneity' as the only possible kind of freedom that goes with determinism, while the

*must do justice to the difference between reasons and causes*".<sup>3</sup> The plausibility of compatibilism does not lie in taking wants as reasons or causes of actions just like other causes. It lies in that acting voluntarily is taken as compatible with certain other kinds of causal-determinations. Thus sophisticated compatibilism only rules out certain types of causal determinations, while it admits of other causal determinations as compatible with actions.

In this sense, *psychological determinism* is ruled out but *physiological determinism* is taken as compatible with voluntary actions.<sup>4</sup> Even if physiological laws are operative in bodily movements, it is possible to do or not to do what one wants to do without violating them. The explanation of human actions at the *ordinary level* involves a *different terminology* than that of physiological states corresponding to the same actions. Thus raising a hand to ask a question may be a free action, despite the fact that physiological laws determine the bodily movements involved. The two levels of explanations do not contradict each other. The action of raising a hand is explainable by wanting to do so, and it depends on the *ability* and *opportunity* to do so. The ordinary level description and explanation of the action of raising one's hand to ask a question for instance, remains true, irrespective of the fact that the physiological processes involved therein are completely caused, and therefore *predictable* by physiological laws.

Kenny's crucial step here is to argue that though actions are compatible with physiological laws, yet actions depend on certain factors that are *independent* of physiological laws. These factors include the *Power* or *Ability* and the *opportunity*. Whereas the bodily movements involved in performing an action at a certain time are determined by physiological laws, the existence of ability and opportunity do not vanish if the action is somehow not performed. Kenny has tried to explain this compatibility by arguing that the ability and the opportunity to do or not to do an action X at time t it is independent of the physiological laws and circumstances obtained. These factors of ability and opportunity are necessary for acting freely. They have the double aspect of 'performance' and 'avoidability'. Their independence from physiological circumstances rests on the following facts.

1. The ability to do X at t is an ability which the agent may possess without necessarily realizing it at t.
2. The existence of the opportunity to do X at t is proven by the fact that the agent has actually performed the action.

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incompatibilists contend that one must be capable of acting contrary to what one wants, in a way that cannot be caused or determined by antecedent conditions. Therefore, Hume's 'liberty of spontaneity' becomes problematic as far as moral accountability of actions is involved). See David Hume, *A treatise of Human Nature*, London: J.M. Dent & sons Ltd. Vol. 11, part 111, pp.113-110)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.148

<sup>4</sup> Psychological determinism is usually taken as the general thesis all the conscious mental states and acts are determined by certain antecedent psychological conditions. Freudian psychoanalysis was based on this assumption. Still, it is debatable whether psychology itself is, or can become, a science in the same sense in which physics, for instance, is a science. (See Ropy Weatherford, *The Implications of Determinism*, London: Routledge, 1991. Chap. XIV). Physiological determinism is usually considered as the general or universal thesis that all conscious mental states and acts are caused by the brain states.

However, this raises the problematic question as to whether the agent also has the opportunity not to do X at t. Kenny gives a complicated answer to this question. He seems to be suggesting that the opportunity not to do X at t is dependent on not wanting to do so. But this is not clear because opportunity is an objective factor, whereas wanting is a *subjective factor*. How can it be that not *wanting creates a negative opportunity*? To make it clear we have to re-examine Kenny's account.

Kenny contends that for an action to be free it is necessary that the agent *want* to perform it. Secondly, he must also have the *ability* to do so. Thirdly, he may also have the *opportunity* to do so. All of these three conditions of freedom are allegedly independent of the physiological circumstances obtained therein. Wants do not necessitate action since one may want to do something and yet may not do something to fulfill that want. Thus, no law-like correlation can exist between wants and physiology.

The second factor, the ability to do something is also independent of physiological circumstances obtained at the time of performance. The ability to do something, like typing for instance, continues to exist whether one actually types a manuscript or not. The agent may possess various abilities of doing things without necessarily exercising them at specific moments of time. If the agent did X at t, it shows that he had the ability to do so, but if he did not do X at t, it does not necessarily follow that he had no ability to do so. He might very well have had the ability but simply did not want to exercise it. Here, his not wanting to do X at t is the reason for his not performing the action. Kenny considers the third factor, the opportunity, on the same grounds. The presence of opportunity to do X at t obtains when the action is actually performed. But for Kenny, the crucial question is whether the agent has the opportunity not to do X at t. How can there be an event describable as not doing? Kenny illustrates this as follows.

*Suppose, e.g., that  $\phi$  is opening one's mouth and that the physiological prediction is that the lips will be one inch apart: if that is what the physiological description is, how can there be a question of having the opportunity not to open one's mouth at t?... the answer is: if one of the features on which the physiological condition is based is a factor which would not have obtained unless the agent wanted to open his mouth, then the physiological condition does not remove opportunity, and thus does not negative freedom.<sup>5</sup>*

This implies that if the agent wanted to open his mouth at t, he also had the opportunity not to open his mouth. The action and the physiological conditions at t would not have obtained unless he wanted to  $\phi$ . In addition, since wants do not necessitate actions therefore  $\phi$ ing at t implies that one also had the opportunity not to  $\phi$ . If the physiological conditions involved in the performance are dependent upon wants, they would not necessitate the action. Thus wanting also brings into focus the opportunity not to do something wanted. In Kenny's words,

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Will, freedom, and Power*, Op. Cit. p. 152 (His emphasis)

... There is [no] law like correlation between wants to open one's mouth and physiological factors of the kind present in this case... It is perfectly possible for there to be a physiological feature which in the circumstances of this case would not be present unless the particular want was present, without there being a general law linking physical and psychological features of the respective kinds.<sup>6</sup>

But this does not seem to explain the whole problem. Unless Kenny assumes that wants are themselves *undetermined* by physiological causes, it is difficult for him to argue that freedom is compatible with physiological determinism.

### The Contingency of Practical Reasoning

Kenny claims that the *contingency* involved between *practical reasoning* and the action performed allows freedom to be possible. However, the physiological descriptions of actions cannot be correlated with the description of actions in any law-like formulations. This entails that freedom is compatible with physiological determinism. Thus, he concludes:

*It seems, then that there is no clear reason for thinking compatibilism false. It has not been shown that 'I can  $\Phi$  at  $t$  (where the can is the all – in 'can') entails that my  $\Phi$ ing, or as the case may be my not  $\Phi$ ing at  $t$  is contingent, in the over all sense that it falls under no covering law and has no antecedent sufficient condition.'*<sup>7</sup>

What Kenny means here is that the contingency of practical reasoning, as understood at the ordinary level of description of actions does not rule out physiological determination of the same at the level of their physiological descriptions. Thus the descriptions, at the ordinary level and the physiological level, of the same *mental acts and overt actions*, imply that one is free at the ordinary level of reasoning yet causally determined at the physiological level. This means, to Kenny, that freedom is compatible with physiological determinism. Nevertheless, a *determinist incompatibilist* believes that any thorough going physical determinism does not allow the possibility of freedom even at the ordinary level of description of actions.<sup>8</sup> But against this physical determinism of a universal kind, Kenny contends that it is not true that all the determining factors of one's bodily movements are outside one's control. He believe that there can be events and processes constituting actions which could be otherwise than what they were if one wished otherwise. This problem surfaces in the two levels of descriptions of actions.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., (His emphasis.)

<sup>8</sup> This is the position that freedom is compatible with a universal physical determinism and since determinism is true thus freedom is impossible. The position is in direct clash with that of a libertarian In compatibilist holding that since freedom is in compatible with determinism and since freedom is true therefore determinism is false.

## Description of Actions

According to Kenny, the incompatibilist is confusing the two levels of descriptions of the same actions. If one alters the level of description, the agent taken at one level becomes an inappropriate subject for attribution of powers at the other level. "When we want to consider the validity of the argument that if the molecules of my mouth can move only in one way then I cannot say anything other than I do, we have to consider a conclusion which differs from the premises not only in its predicate but also in its subject."<sup>9</sup> What Kenny means here is that if a twitch of muscle cannot be said to be otherwise than how it actually is, it does not imply that the agent could not have acted otherwise than what he actually did. This is so because the subject and the predicate in the premises are different from the subject and the predicate in the conclusion. The muscle and its twitching are different from an agent and his action. Thus, one cannot argue that since physical determinism is true no person can act otherwise than what he actually does. But Kenny thinks that the compatibility of freedom and physiological determinism is justifiable because of different levels of descriptions of actions involved. For Kenny, the *sophisticated compatibilist* approach rejects incompatibility of neuro-physiological explanation of actions with the ordinary level explanations. Thus, according to Kenny:

*The concepts and vocabulary of physiology are totally different from those employed in the everyday description of human behavior. It is only actions described in terms of human behavior that libertarians claim to be free. Even one hundred percent predictability at the level of physiology need not by itself involve any increase in predictability at the human level. For physiological laws will enable us to predict only physiological effects from physiological causes; and we shall need in addition at least translation-rules from the language of physiology into language of human behavior. On the other hand, from an action described in human terms a further action describe in the same terms may well be predicted; as in certain circumstances from the making of an appointment one may predict the keeping of the appointment. But it would be impossible for prediction in these terms to achieve one hundred percent certainty, since the everyday language of intention and motive, praise and blame, reward and reprimand presupposes a structure of freedom and limited predictability.<sup>10</sup>*

This shows the Kenny's account of freedom of action and freedom of will is based on the impossibility of formulating *rules of translation* from physiological to the mental. The later, as understood ordinarily, presupposes a vocabulary of freedom independent of any reduction to physiological determinism. Thus, Kenny thinks our claims to freedom are legitimate at the ordinary level of description of human actions. The question whether physiological determinism is true or false does not bother him, since he believes there is no contradiction in continuing to believe that we are free, despite the truth of physiological determinism at the level of bodily movements. However, this kind of compatibilism does not solve the problem posed by traditional, as well as the contemporary compatibilism. Contemporary compatibilism takes freedom as the

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<sup>9</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Op. Cit.* p. 157.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149

possibility of actions caused by desires, but without compulsion. In other words, freedom means freedom from compulsion or constraint, rather than freedom from causes.

But, as it will become clear henceforth, this kind of compatibilist freedom is dissolution, rather than a fair deal with the actual problem of freedom. For one thing, the idea of actions being caused by desires or wants without compulsion presupposes *the possibility of acting otherwise* than what one wants to do. Thus, merely wanting to do something, by itself, is not sufficient to prove that one is free. If this is not taken as a condition of freedom, there is no point in distinguishing compelled actions from uncompelled actions. Both are caused by the unconscious factors, though the compulsive desire cannot be avoided but the normal ones can be. This avoidance, in other words means that one can act otherwise than what one wants to do. But this is left unclear in Kenny's view about compatibilism. Harry G. Frankfurt exposes the problem inherent in the compatibilist thesis very clearly:

*Just what kind of freedom is the freedom of the will? This question calls for an identification of the special area of human experience to which the concept of freedom of the will, as distinct from the concepts of other sorts of freedom is particularly germane... According to one familiar philosophical tradition, being free is fundamentally a matter of doing what one wants to do. Now the notion of an agent who does what he wants to do is by no means an altogether clear one... But.. I believe that the notion does capture at least part of what is implicit in the idea of an agent who acts freely. It misses entirely; however, the peculiar content of the quite different idea of an agent whose will is free.*<sup>11</sup>

Frankfurt thinks that the question of freedom must invoke the idea of free will as distinct from the idea of wants. Without this, Frankfurt thinks the problem of freedom of human action cannot be addressed in its appropriate context. Thus, it seems the compatibilist overlooks the distinction between men and animals. Frankfurt states:

*We do not suppose that animals enjoy freedom of the will, although one recognizes that an animal may be free to run in whatever direction it wants. Thus having freedom to do what one wants to do is not a sufficient condition of having a free will. It is not a necessary condition either, for to deprive some one of his freedom of action is not necessarily to undermine the freedom of his will.*<sup>12</sup>

Here, the point raised by Frankfurt is clear to the extent that compatibilism does not capture what it means to have freedom of the will, in contrast to the determination of action by desires or wants. Kenny's claim, that ordinary level descriptions of actions do not contradict physiological determinism, implies that it is sufficient for freedom that actions should be described in terms of desires or wants, without recourse to neuro-physiological description. If a desire is caused by brain events, which in turn are caused

<sup>11</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, *Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person*, in *The Journal of philosophy*, vol. IX Viii, No 1, 1971, P. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

by the outside events, and the agent acts according to fulfill the desire, this is not a threat to his freedom. He still acts freely, as far as he can describe his action in term of what he wanted to do rather than by what he was caused to do.

But this freedom seems to make no sense if our description of action refers to the causes of desire. In that case, we would be forced to describe it as *he was caused to want to do what he wanted to do*. Normally we do not describe actions in those terms, but if Kenny's account of compatibilism is true then we have to acknowledge the fact that desires must be caused by physiological factors. In that case, what we describe normally or ordinarily as our desire to pray, for instance, would be an incomplete description, implicitly presupposing that such desires are caused by physiological demands. Thus we see that compatibilism unavoidably leads to the issue of causal determination of actions, which is incompatible with our ordinary level belief in freedom. This is so because ordinary belief in freedom presupposes the belief in the possibility of acting otherwise than what one wants to do. But given physiological determinism, it is impossible to act otherwise than what one is caused to want to do. The impossibility is a consequence of the fact, that physiological determinism implies the possibility of *one hundred percent predictability* of events at physiological level. Thus obviously, if physiological processes cause the wants, then such predictability of wants cannot be ruled out. Consequently, either the ordinary level description of action are vacuous, in which case physiological determinism is true, or those are merely ignorant expressions of what lies underneath. Here we are faced with two kinds of problems.

1. The ordinary descriptions of desires or wants are invalid, because wants are physiologically caused.
2. The description of wants, as understood ordinarily, is vacuous. Wanting is not truly a matter of conscious reasoning. Given the physiological causes of wants, all reasoning is epiphenomenal.

These two problems are explained in what follows

### Validity of the Ordinary Descriptions

What is the relation between wanting and doing what one wants? It is clear that the rational agent's way of acting on what he wants is different from that of an irrational agent like a drug addict for instance. The former reflects, deliberates, or in general, thinks about the *desirability* or *undesirability* of what he wants under the particular moral code. This deliberation makes a difference to his actions in case of a conflict between what he wants and what ought to be done. The irrational agent might deliberate in the same way, but he, being unable to change his uncontrollable wants, acts ineluctably as the want dictates him. In fact, the distinction between the rational and the irrational agent hinges on the very possibility of the efficacy of one's deliberations upon one's desires. Hampshire considers that desires and wants can be changed or formed through one's rational considerations.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Harry G. Frankfurt takes it as fundamental for being a person that one must be capable of forming what he calls 'higher order desires'. Frankfurt states:

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<sup>13</sup> Stuart Hampshire, *Freedom of the Individual*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1975, p. 39

*It seems to be peculiarly characteristic of humans... that they are able to form what I shall call "second-order desires" or "desires of the second order. "Besides wanting and choosing and being moved to do this or that. Men may also want to have (or not to have) certain desires and motives. They are capable of wanting to be different, In their preference and purposes, from what they are. Many animals appear to have the capacity for what I shall call "first-order desires" or "desires of the first order", which are simply desires to do or not do one thing or another. No animal other than man, however, appears to have the capacity for reflective self-evaluation that is manifest in the formation of second-order desires.*<sup>14</sup>

Keeping this in focus, Kenny's distinction between ordinary and the physiological levels of descriptions comes to this. Given the truth of physiological determinism, the ordinary descriptions conflict with the descriptions of the same at the physiological level. Thus, the question of a true description inevitably arises here. Now let us apply the same to an ordinary case of 'wanting X'. It is clear here that, given physiological determinism, it would be necessary for a valid description of 'wanting X' to refer to the causes of 'wanting X', as factors other than just 'wanting X'. If, as a result of physiological changes in my brain, I become conscious of 'wanting to wear a blue shirt', obviously my wanting so is caused by these changes. It is not truly a matter of my choice, since my choice here is itself caused by factors beyond my choice.

Here an important objection may be made against the above that this confuses the issue between description and explanation. In a description, one only states what is the case and in explanation, one states why it is so. However, Desires or wants are not merely propositions. Therefore, ordinary level descriptions of wants are not merely propositions stating what the case is; rather these are associated with reasons of the agent as his beliefs. Thus the description of wants must involve reference to those reasons, without which there validity remains problematic. Consequently, a valid description of wants conflicts with physiological description of the same. If physiological determinism is true then the agent's beliefs and conscious apprehensions associated with his wants do not describe the true state of affairs.

### **Vacuity of the Ordinary Descriptions**

The vacuity of ordinary description, in case physiological determinism is true, means that description of wants cannot be *knowledge claims*. They are just like an addict's conscious response that 'he wants a drug'. Knowledge claims of rational agent imply that he knows what he wants. If asked, he can describe what he wants, and is able to offer his reasons for his want. Here it is difficult to see in what sense a rational agent could be different from a drug addict if, in both cases, wants are caused by physiological factors. Kenny's views suggest that rational agent can think differently about his wants as opposed to a drug addict.

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<sup>14</sup> Harry G. Frankfurt, Op Cit., pp. 82-83 (Though this entails and infinite regress of *wanting to want what one wants*, yet it seems without the ability of forming second order desires, humans would be no different than animals)

But if thinking differently is effective in changing the want, one might allow a distinction between the rational agent and drug addict. However, given physiological determinism, thinking differently implies wanting differently. And thus, again, wanting differently implies being caused to want differently. Now either one must allow that thinking differently about one's wants is independent of physiology, or it is not. The former contradicts compatibilism, the latter entails it. Nevertheless, if wants are determined by physiology, our conscious reasoning about our wants is vacuous, since we will continue to want what we want, as the wants are beyond our conscious control. Secondly, it makes no sense to hold that we are still free regarding our wants, under ordinary descriptions, even if their physiological description is *subsumable under natural laws*. Obviously, the laws of nature are beyond consciousness. One only experiences regularity, one does not bring it about by thinking about it.

Now Kenny holds that freedom means possibility of acting on wants under ordinary descriptions, which do not contradict their physiological descriptions. However given physiological determinism it must be true that consciously wanting 'X at t1' under the ordinary description, has its *exact correlate* every time a neuro-physiological event 'N' takes place in the brain at 't1'. In addition 'consciously wanting Z at t2' has its exact correlate, a neural-event 'P' in the brain at t2. It is clear that one has no choice over 'N' or 'P', occurring or not occurring at t1 and t2. It is also clear that at 't1' nothing else, but 'N' can occur. In addition, at t2 nothing else but P can take place respectively. Therefore, at t1 one can only want X, and at t2 one can only want Z. The time of occurrence of neuro-physiological event N or P exactly correlates with the time of wanting X or Z.

Thus, Kenny's view of compatibilism implies that one is free to do what one wants at t1, and free to do what one wants at t2, *despite the impossibility* that one could have wanted something other than X or Z at t1 or t2. However, it seems that given the impossibility of occurrence of any other event than N or P at t1 and t2 one could not have done something else at the specific time, unless some other correlating- event Q or R occurred at those times.

From this, it follows that one may think of oneself as free to do what one wants under ordinary description. Nevertheless, one is not free to do something else instead unless another neuro-physiological event changes the course of our conscious apprehension regarding what one wants. Here, it is clear that, as neuro-physiological events, all mental events have their *antecedent determinations* outside them, within the recesses of brain, which itself has similar determinations external to it. However, it seems problematic on part of Kenny to believe in the correlation of physiological and ordinary description of wants without conceding them as causally correlated. This entails that he considers these correlations as a matter of coincidence.

Thus, Kenny thinks the absence of their causal relation renders the conscious mental acts free from any causal determinations ordinarily apprehended. But it is obvious that this apparent freedom is no different from the freedom of a Cartesian automaton, or a computer, for that matter. All the outputs of a computer in the form of propositions, describable in ordinary language, that appear on the screen, are dependent on the law-

like regularity of electronic circuits inside. In one way, computational propositions are propositions, in another way, these are combinations of binary symbols caused by the flow of electricity. It is then, sufficient to conclude, regarding the above problem, that Kenny's view of compatibilism renders ordinary description of wants *vacuous* in that they are causally determined by their exactly correlated physiological non-conscious brain events. Consequently, Kenny's compatibilism seems no different from Skinner's behaviorist determinism. Skinner states:

*Eventually a science of the nervous system based upon direct observation rather than inference will describe the neural states and events which immediately precede, say, the response, "No, thank you". Those events in turn will be found to be preceded by other neurological events, and these in turn by others. This series will lead us back to events outside the nervous system and, eventually, outside the organism.*<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, if ordinary descriptions of wants are in fact reducible to their exact correlates in mechanical operations in physics, they are no different than sheer noises in the brain; of which one becomes conscious at the time they occur. Thus, it makes no difference if we describe these noises as *I want to climb the mountain*. Kenny seems to go even beyond Skinner's behaviorism in identifying wants as physiological events. Skinner believes that neural events *immediately precede* the mental events, while Kenny seems to take them as *coincident*, in line with Spinoza that "... *The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of causes...*"<sup>16</sup>. Stripping the metaphysical clothing from *Spinoza's mind-body identity*, what comes out of it seems clearly resembling Kenny's view of compatibilism. Whether we describe our wants in ordinary terms or in physiological ones, both are descriptions of the same event.

Moreover, then it follows that ordinary description of wants are nothing but *linguistic expressions* of what happens inside the brain. These descriptions only *symbolize* the neural events. The proof would be to ask from Kenny whether wanting something would be possible without a correlated or identical neural event or process taking place simultaneously. Surely, Kenny's would not allow this. Thus, it is clear that given Kenny's view on compatibilism, ordinary description of wants becomes *vacuous*. This vacuity also implies a larger consequence that all conscious apprehension that makes us human is identical with physiological processes, conforming to their physiological description subsumable under natural laws. Still, Kenny might contend that our common sense view of ourselves has not vanished, and remains functional for us, despite alternative description of ordinary conscious apprehensions. Contrarily, Austin Farrer states:

*... So common sense may hold, but, epiphenomenalism will say, so much the worse for common sense. Our consciousness of seeing things is veridical. Our sense of doing things on the basis of what we see is delusive. Perception is a priceless, and intention a worthless clue to the function of the mind. In spite of appearance, our mind does nothing*

<sup>15</sup> B.F. Skinner, *Science of Human Behavior*, New York: Macmillan & Co., 1953. p.28

<sup>16</sup> Benedict De Spinoza. "*of the nature and Origin of the Mind*", Part II, Prop. XIX, Proof, in the *Chief Works of Spinoza*, Trans. by R.H Elwis, vol. 11, new York: Dover Publication, Inc 195, P. 101.

*but perceive. In perception commonly so called, we are aware of things with which our nervous system is engaged. In thought we are aware of the tentative reactions of our bodily system to what has been perceived on a more immediate level. In decision and action it is the effective reaction of the organism which makes itself felt. At any stage consciousness reflects with broad, simplified and conventionalized effects a highly complicated physical reactions system in play. If thought and decision do not seem like perception, it is because we are self-identified with our nerves and with what we do, in a way in which we cannot be self-identified with exterior objects of our sensation. But in spite of all differences of feel, there is essentially one function, awareness. That which consciousness represents, or identifies itself with, does the whole work of man, the conscious representation does not work. It is a causal dead –end all the time a strengthless shadow cast by real act.<sup>17</sup>*

This makes it clear that any view that harbors a belief in the rational agency of man involves the assumption that *to be a rational agent means* having the capacity to reflect upon the given mental and physical episodes. This reflection does in fact succeed in changing the underlying causal patterns, which otherwise ensue in deterministically predictable ways into actions, without rational agent's consent.

### Conclusion

Given the question of the status of a *rational agent* in a causally determined physical universe, the problem of freedom of action is not as simple as it appears to common sense. If our conscious reasoning about actions makes any difference to the non-conscious causal pattern, *it must be shown* that the reasoning itself is somehow not an outcome of another causal pattern. So far, it is clear that the compatibilist freedom seems merely a *feeling of freedom arising out of having acted as wanted* rather than the *freedom of a rational agent*, who is believed to have the power to think and act *independently of* the predictable psycho-physical determinations that may cause him to want to act in a particular way. It is also clear, so far, that it is the *possibility of alternative actions on rational considerations* that truly matters where our freedom of action is in question. The occasion for this arises whenever the question arises as to whether *one could have acted otherwise than what one did*; though one did what one wanted! Compatibilism of freedom and determinism brings out that though we are free, yet our freedom is compatible with a determinism that does not allow the possibility of *alternative actions* independently of what *causes us* to want to act. Given this, it seems compatibilism overrides the distinction required for being a rational agent who may act *willingly* sometimes against what he wants, though he may enjoy compatibilist freedom most of the time!

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<sup>17</sup> Austin Farrer. *The Freedom of the Will*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975, p. 75