



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Mind Association

Review: [untitled]

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Source: *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 110, No. 438 (Apr., 2001), pp. 432-438

Published by: [Oxford University Press](#) on behalf of the [Mind Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2660174>

Accessed: 24/02/2011 13:33

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though in ways which would seem to make it better qualified to be a person's first brush with our subject. Unlike Ayer's book, it does not presuppose prior knowledge. It is more modest in its scope, and much shorter, than either Russell's or Gaarder's. A beginner needs to get a feel for philosophy, but need not strive to know all the main views of all the main philosophers. *Think* gives a feel for the subject that is indisputably authentic, and does so in elegant prose and a compact format. If this is a rational and predictable world, *Think* will be very popular.

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Freedom and Responsibility, by Hilary Bok. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998. Pp. 220. H/b. £26.95.

In *Freedom and Responsibility*, Hilary Bok gives a broadly speaking 'Kantian' defence of the compatibility of 'mechanism' (of which one variety is causal determinism) and such notions as freedom and moral responsibility. Her approach is to distinguish between two perspectives: that of practical reasoning and that of theoretical reasoning. These perspectives, or points of view, are distinguished in large measure by their purposes; the purpose of theoretical reason is to describe and explain the world, whereas the purpose of practical reason is to ascertain reasons and thereby assist the agent in deciding what to do. Bok argues that, given their different purposes or scope, the deliverances of theoretical and practical reason cannot conflict. Practical reason may use information provided by theoretical reason, and conclusions of practical reason may even supervene on those of theoretical reason; and yet, since conclusions of practical reason are (roughly speaking) about what one has reason to do, whereas deliverances of theoretical reason merely provide purely descriptive information about the world, they cannot conflict. Thus, the notions of freedom and moral responsibility that necessarily emerge from the perspective of practical reasoning cannot conflict with mechanistic conclusions of theoretical reasoning.

Bok begins by laying out what she takes to be the fundamental problem of freedom of the will. 'Mechanism', according to Bok, 'is the view that human actions can be explained as the result of natural processes alone; that the "mechanistic style of explanation, which works so well for electrons, motors, and galaxies", also works for us' (p. 3). The fundamental problem of free will, then, is to reconcile mechanism with our intuitive views of ourselves as free and morally responsible. Although Bok spends a good deal of time seeking to explain this fundamental problem, I was left a bit unsure of what she takes the

problem to be.

Bok says that I have a certain sort of prereflective view of my freedom. Roughly this is the view that my character and past experiences present me with a 'path of least resistance: some way of seeing [the relevant] situation and of responding to it. But I also think that I can choose whether or not to take that path; that I can, at any point, step back from my character, ask whether the response it offers me is the best one, and, if I wish, choose another' (p. 11). Bok goes on to say, 'If mechanism is true, then, given that the world was as it was and that the indeterministic natural events that affected my choice occurred as they did, I could not have done anything but what I actually did; I could not even have thought anything but what I actually thought' (p. 13). But I do not see how mechanism, as defined by Bok, is supposed to have the conclusion that we lack alternative possibilities; it is plausible that *causal determinism* has this consequence, but it is much less clear that mechanism *per se* does.

Bok seems to think that it is fairly obvious that if mechanism is true, then this would threaten our intuitive view of ourselves as 'active and spontaneous', in part because it entails that there is no 'radical difference in kind' between the ways in which 'humans and animals cause their behavior and the ways in which inanimate objects are caused to move' (p. 14). Bok believes that mechanism threatens our prereflective view that we have a crucial capacity for 'spontaneous action' (p. 16–17). Further, Bok separates the threats from mechanism and causal determinism, saying, 'In this work I will assume that ... the central issue between libertarians and compatibilists is the compatibility of freedom not with determinism but with mechanism; that determinism threatens freedom because it is a version of mechanism; and that libertarians should take no comfort from the idea that our actions might be caused by indeterministic natural events' (p. 3).

But why exactly does mechanism *per se* (apart from the stronger doctrine, causal determinism) threaten our capacity for the relevant sort of spontaneity? Some of what Bok says seems to indicate a confusion of the threats posed by mechanism and causal determinism. For example, she says, 'If mechanism is true, however, my character and the activities of my self are equally determined by past events. If I have a character, then I must follow the course it lays out for me...' (p. 17). The argument here seems to flow from the supposition that the past does not merely cause, but causally *determine* the present; this is not merely mechanism, but *causal determinism*.

Consider the suggestion (mentioned above) that if mechanism is true, then there is no difference in kind with respect to causation between mere inanimate objects and us. This seems to play a major role in Bok's view of the threat posed by mechanism. She says, 'Libertarianism ... allows us to explain why we are morally responsible for our conduct by appealing to a difference in kind between the causes of our actions and those of other events. Mechanism, by contrast, implies that no such differences in kind exist. The point of mechanism is to postulate a kind of total metaphysical homogeneity between persons

and nonpersons, and between the causes of our actions and those of other events...’ (p. 39). Bok goes on to admit that although there is ‘total homogeneity’ with respect to the fact that behaviour is caused, there may be differences in the *nature* of that causation (differences of those sort typically identified by compatibilists). But she sceptically issues a challenge to the compatibilist to find some *relevant* difference in the sorts of causation. (pp. 29–35)

Bok says, for example:

Libertarians will want to know how any natural property could give us reason to ascribe moral responsibility to those who possess it ... Compatibilists will, no doubt, give something like the following response: the crucial thing about our choices is that they are made on the basis of reasons, after deliberation, and that they are made by persons who can be asked to explain and justify their behavior and on whom praise and blame might be expected to have some influence. If mechanism is true, however, a given agent’s reasoning and deliberation must be sequences of natural events ... To explain why we have reason to hold persons responsible for the effects of their choices, compatibilists must not only cite some property which only our choices possess ... but explain why the fact that choices have this property gives us reason to ascribe moral responsibility to the persons who make them. (p. 34)

I find Bok’s framing of the problem somewhat puzzling. Of course, it follows straightforwardly from the definition of mechanism that there is no difference in kind between us and mere objects with respect to *the fact of causation*. But if the question is, ‘What makes it the case that mechanism threatens freedom and responsibility?’, it does not seem to me to advance the dialectic simply to point out that mechanism entails that everything (including our choices and behaviour) is naturalistically caused. That is, given a plausible dialectical context, the more interesting way to pose the question would be, ‘What is it about mechanism’s implication that everything is naturalistically caused that threatens our freedom and moral responsibility?’ Now, presumably, the issue will be whether there is some *other* (relevant) difference in kind between us and mere inanimate objects, even on the assumption of mechanism.

Bok suggests that the *only* promising way of explaining the difference in kind must appeal to the distinction between the perspectives of practical and theoretical reasoning. Before I turn to this move, I simply want to note that a compatibilist may wish to distinguish different kinds of freedom or ‘control’, and to suggest that a certain distinctive and salient sort of control can be exercised even when an agent lacks the sort of freedom that involves alternative possibilities. If moral responsibility is associated with this sort of ‘actual-sequence control’, and such control can be exhibited in a deterministic sequence, then there is at least a potential answer to Bok’s challenge to identify the naturalistic property in virtue of which we can hold agents responsible. If actual-sequence control can ground moral responsibility, then there would be an answer to Bok’s challenge to find a non-arbitrary stopping point as one traces ‘backward’ along the causal chain—an answer that emerges (and whose

significance can be appreciated), as far as I can see, entirely within the theoretical standpoint.

Bok argues that even if we have a mechanistic explanation of the world, there is still a point to engaging in practical reasoning. This is in part because the purpose (and thus content) of practical reasoning is different from theoretical reasoning: when I engage in practical reasoning, I am (in part) trying to figure out what I have reason to do. Further, Bok offers an intriguing—although challenging—argument for the contention that I cannot (even in principle) know my own future choices and behaviour (pp. 79–88). She thus argues for the *indispensability* of practical reasoning.

Since we cannot know what we will choose (and do), Bok contends that our deliberations must operate with a notion of ‘ability’ or ‘power’ that prescind from information about our actual choice and its causal history (and constituents). When I consider various courses of action in my practical reasoning, I ask myself what would be the case, if I were to choose *X*; what would be the case, if I were to choose *Y*; and so forth. I do not assume anything about what I *will* in fact choose—I leave these considerations to the side, since I am trying to make up my mind about what I have reason to do. Given the nature and purpose of practical reasoning, Bok contends that one should adopt a particular notion of ‘possibility’: ‘it is possible for *A* to do *X* at *T* if the proposition ‘*A* does *X* at *T*’ is compatible with those propositions about the state of the world at *T* that can be inferred from some proposition expressing the state of the world at some instant at or prior to *A*’s choice, together with those that express laws of physics, if we prescind from any information about what *A* actually chooses to do or about the events that constitute her choice’ (p. 97, n. 4).

Bok admits that this ‘compatibilist’ notion of possibility will be controversial, and that it is easy to fall into ‘dialectical stalemates’ in considering whether this notion, or a narrower, incompatibilist notion, is more appropriate. Bok contends that adverting to the distinction between theoretical and practical reasoning (and their associated perspectives) will help to break the stalemates. Given the purpose of practical reasoning, we must abstract away from information about our actual choices; this suggests that the notion of possibility that is relevant to practical reasoning is Bok’s compatibilistic notion of possibility. Similarly, Bok defines freedom of the will as follows: ‘a person is free if she is capable of determining her actions through practical reasoning; such an agent is free to choose among all those acts that she would perform if she chose to perform them, and she is free to perform a given action if she would perform it if she chose to do so’ (p. 120). Note that, although she presents the *definiens* as a sufficient condition, she claims that she is offering a definition of freedom here.

In my view, the notion of possibility adopted by Bok, and the associated account of free will, is problematic. The problems are similar to those which afflict traditional, ‘conditional’ analyses of the freedom linked to moral responsibility; even though Bok is aware of these problems, I do not see how

her own approach successfully avoids them. Imagine, for example, that one's brain is being systematically subjected to manipulation by an external agent. More specifically, we can imagine that one's choices are being produced via manipulation by an external agent (of whom one is completely unaware). As far as I can see, Bok's accounts of 'possibility' and free will do not entail that one's freedom need be in any way curtailed in this scenario. The problem is that if we prescind from information concerning the actual causal pathway to the choice, then we cannot capture certain freedom-undermining circumstances. In the scenario sketched above, it may well be the case that one would have done something different, if one had chosen: the problem is that one's choice was actually produced in a way that undermines freedom and moral responsibility.

Now it may be that Bok supposes that the sort of manipulation envisaged above is ruled out by her suggestion that 'a person is free if she is capable of determining her actions through practical reasoning'. But this clause in the definition of free will would need to be filled in; lacking such an elaboration, it is unclear why the problematic manipulation could not 'go through' the practical reasoning. And the problem, in my view, is not restricted to somewhat arcane hypothetical contexts involving manipulation, brainwashing, subliminal advertising, and so forth. The basic worry is that there can be actual sequences involving significant childhood trauma, abuse, poverty, and so forth that lead (in certain problematic ways) to an individual's actual values and choices. Of course the contention that such sequences rule out freedom and responsibility is controversial; but it is plausible that there are *some* such stories that could be told that would elicit the judgments that the individuals in question are not free or responsible (or have diminished freedom and responsibility). (For a similar worry, see Robert Kane's review of Bok's book, 'Left-over Liberty', *Times Literary Supplement*, August 8, 1999.) Here, again, the problem with Bok's approach is that it abstracts away from the actual causal pathways to the choices that the individual makes—and yet facts about the actual pathways are crucial to our considered intuitions about agents' freedom and responsibility. (Indeed, I prefer what I have called an 'actual-sequence' approach to moral responsibility, according to which the properties of the actual pathway to the behaviour in question are the grounds of moral responsibility.)

Imagine, again, an individual who is being significantly manipulated in such a way as to render him uncontroversially not free and morally responsible for his choices and behaviour. From the practical point of view, the agent may take himself to be free and morally responsible; prescinding from information about the actual causal pathway to the individual's choices and behaviour, there will be no obstacle to considering the individual free and morally responsible. And yet the individual is *not* free or morally responsible. (I suppose this judgment is made from the theoretical point of view, but any contrary impression generated from the practical point of view would here appear

to be delusory.) Note that the problem with such an agent need not be that she lacks the capacity to determine her conduct through practical reasoning; the practical reasoning itself may be significantly manipulated and thus impaired (although in a clandestine fashion). Bok's methodology can appear to secure the compatibility of mere causation (or mechanism) with freedom and moral responsibility by the process of 'abstraction' from information about the actual causal pathway to choices and behaviour. But it *also* seems to imply a stronger, more distressing result: that actual causation by certain intuitively freedom-undermining sequences is entirely compatible with freedom and responsibility. At least I do not see how the resources of Bok's two-standpoint approach, un-supplemented by ancillary considerations, can address the problems posed by *special* causation.

I agree with Bok that we all have an interest in engaging in practical reasoning, even in a mechanistic (or causally deterministic) world. I greatly admire Bok's critique of Van Inwagen's contention that we could not deliberate in a causally deterministic world (pp. 109–114). I believe that there is a point to deliberation, insofar as the agent does not know which choice she will make; thus, on my view, the alternatives for the purposes of practical reasoning are 'epistemic possibilities', or those courses of action one does not know to be ruled out. But I would distinguish sharply between these epistemic possibilities and metaphysical possibilities (which, suitably understood, would presumably be absent—or inaccessible—in a causally deterministic world). I think it is a mistake to go from considerations pertinent to our interest in practical reasoning to a conclusion about metaphysical possibilities, even where those possibilities are construed compatibilistically. But this move seems to be central to Bok's overall project in the book.

If the world is deterministic and thus I have no genuinely accessible alternative possibilities (and I know this), I can still sensibly deliberate, given that I do not know which choice I will in fact make (and thus I do not know which path is the only one that I in fact can take). In my view, then, purposes of practical reasoning can be secured by employing epistemic possibilities. Bok briefly considers, and dismisses, this contention, on the ground that we wish to have a notion of possibility such that one can be mistaken about which possibilities one has (p. 106). I agree that we might be quite wrong in our beliefs about which courses of action are metaphysically possible for us, and we want a notion of possibility that accommodates this fact. But this is quite consistent with holding that it is the *epistemic possibilities* that are relevant to our practical reasoning. When I engage in practical reasoning, I consider those courses of action that, for all I know, are available to me. Now it may turn out that some of these paths are in fact closed to me, but this does not imply that it is inappropriate for me to take them as options, for the purposes of deliberation (and given the information I have available, from the *practical point of view*). Thus, taking the practical point of view does *not* lead to adopting any sort of compatibilist account of the *metaphysical possibilities* that are available to us.

In developing her ‘Kantian’ approach to freedom and moral responsibility toward the end of the book (especially pages 158–166), Bok contends (repeatedly) that when one takes the practical point of view, one must ‘regard oneself’ as not subject to causal determination. Here is just one example: ‘Insofar as regarding our choices as caused involves regarding them as determined by antecedent events, we cannot regard ourselves as caused to choose as we do when we engage in practical reasoning’ (p. 161. Note, again, that the threat at issue here appears to come not from mechanism *per se* but from causal determinism, despite Bok’s suggestion to the contrary). But I do not agree. When I engage in practical reasoning, I ask what I have reason to do; thus, admittedly, I am concerned with a set of normative issues, *not* with aetiology. It seems to me that when I engage in practical reasoning, I simply put aside or ‘bracket’ the issue of whether I am causally determined. (Causation is typically irrelevant, when I am asking about what reasons I have, just as the plumbing is typically irrelevant when I am painting the house.) This is different, I take it, from not ‘regarding’ myself as casually determined (or, certainly, from regarding myself as not causally determined). I am not sure exactly what ‘regarding’ is, but certainly I can engage in practical reasoning while simultaneously believing (perhaps implicitly or dispositionally) that I am causally determined. It does not *follow* from the distinctive purposes and characteristics of practical reasoning that, when one engages in it, one must believe that one is not causally determined.

Bok’s book is thoughtful and philosophically sophisticated. Bok is intellectually honest and unwilling to settle for easy solutions to difficult problems. Indeed, she exhibits a deep respect for the libertarian’s position. Her development of a Kantian position on these matters (without too much Kantian exegesis!) is helpful and illuminating. We agree that one can take libertarianism very seriously and yet still defend compatibilism. Bok believes the key to accomplishing this task is the distinction between the two standpoints, whereas I would employ the twin distinctions between different kinds of metaphysical freedom (actual-sequence and alternative-possibilities) and between metaphysical and epistemic possibility. Despite my preference for a different path to a similar conclusion, I commend this book as a distinctive, subtle, and suggestive defence of compatibilism.

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