

Free Will, Praise and Blame

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In this article I try to refute the so-called "libertarian" theory of free will, and to examine how our conclusions ought to modify our common attitudes of praise and blame. In attacking the libertarian view, I shall try to show that it cannot be consistently stated. That is, my discussion will be an "analytic-philosophical" one. I shall neglect what I think is in practice an equally powerful method of attack on the libertarian: a challenge to state his theory in such a way that it will fit in with modern biology and psychology, which are becoming increasingly physicalistic.

It is difficult to state clearly just what is the metaphysical view about free will to which I object. This is because it seems to me to be a self-contradictory one, and in formal logic any proposition whatever can be shown to follow from a contradiction. However in practice a confused and contradictory view does lead to a certain fairly characteristic set of propositions and attitudes. (In the case we are considering, one of these is that righteous indignation is an appropriate emotion in certain circumstances.¹) The reason why a contradictory position can in practice lead to a circumscribed set of propositions is that the contradiction is not recognised by those who hold the views in question. Hence the logical proof schema which enables you to deduce any proposition whatever from a contradiction cannot be applied. It follows that a confused metaphysical view can have important practical consequences and may, for example, mean the difference between life and death to a criminal or a heretic.

When, in nineteenth-century England, the rich man brushed aside all consideration for his unsuccessful rivals in the battle for wealth and position, and looking at them as they starved in the gutter said to himself, "Well, they had the same opportunities as I had. If I took more advantage of them than they did, that is not my fault but theirs," he was most probably not only callous but (as I shall try to show) metaphysically confused. A man who said "Hereditry and environment made me what I am and made them what they are" would

be less likely to fall a prey to this sort of callousness and indifference. Metaphysical views about free will are therefore practically important, and their importance is often in inverse proportion to their clarity.

What is this metaphysical view about free will that I wish to attack? Its supporters usually characterise it negatively, by contrasting it with what it is not, namely determinism on the one hand and pure chance or caprice on the other. This is a dangerous procedure, because a negative characterisation may rule out absolutely every possibility; as if we defined a new sort of natural number, a "free" number, as one which is neither prime nor divisible by a number which is greater than one and smaller than itself. Our negative characterisation, that is, may be so comprehensive as to leave room for no possibility whatever. However let us play the metaphysician's game as long as we can, and let us try to see what the metaphysical doctrine of free will is, at least by investigating what it is not. And what it is not is, first of all, determinism.

"What would become of your laws, your morality, your religion, your gallows, your Paradise, your Gods, your Hell, if it were shown that such and such fluids, such fibres, or a certain acidity in the blood, or in the animal spirits, alone suffice to make a man the object of your punishments or your rewards?" So wrote the notorious Marquis de Sade.² According to Nigel Balchin, "The modern endocrinologist sometimes goes far to support de Sade, and draws a rather humiliating picture of a man as a sort of chemico-electric experiment, in which a drop too much of this, or a grain too little of that, is the origin of personality. The psychologist insists that an apparently minor incident or accident in the early stages of our development may affect the whole course of our lives. In the face of this comparison of views most of us are inclined to compromise. We believe that heredity, accident, and incident have a bearing on man's character and actions, and may even sometimes have a determinative one. But we do not accept the complete

suspension of moral judgment implicit in de Sade's view."³

These quotations come from literary, rather than professionally philosophical sources, but there is nothing in them, I think, which would not be endorsed by the ablest philosophical defenders of the metaphysical notion of freedom, for example, C. A. Campbell. Two comments are important at this stage. The first is that not only de Sade, but his biographer Nigel Balchin and the philosopher Campbell, and very many men in the street, hold that to accept the deterministic position is to give up the notion of moral responsibility. The second is that the view outlined by Balchin does not entail the absurdity that we can never predict what people will do. According to Balchin, heredity and environment are important, though they do not exhaust the matter. And, as Campbell holds, free will need only be supposed to operate in cases of moral conflict when our nature is determined by heredity and environment pulls us away from the path of duty. Since cases of moral conflict are rare, we can usually predict people's behaviour just as confidently as if we believed wholeheartedly in the determinist position. So the common argument against metaphysical freedom, that it makes nonsense of our confidence in predicting human behavior, falls to the ground. (Hume, for example,⁴ pointed out that the condemned prisoner prefers to attack the stone walls of his cell rather than the inflexible nature of his gaolers.) So I shall not press this particular objection.

Those who hold that determinism and moral responsibility are incompatible with one another do not, of course, hold that we are responsible for those of our actions which are due to pure chance. Somehow they want our moral choices to be neither determined nor a matter of chance. Campbell has a word for it: he says that our moral choices are instances of "contra-causal freedom."⁵ There is not "unbroken causal continuity" in the universe, but we are sometimes able to choose between "genuinely open possibilities." None of these concepts is at all precisely defined by

Campbell, but I propose to give definitions of “unbroken causal continuity” and of “pure chance” that may be acceptable to him, and to like-minded thinkers, and I shall then enquire whether in the light of these definitions there is any room for “contra-causal freedom” and “genuinely open possibilities.”

(D1.) I shall state the view that there is “unbroken causal continuity” in the universe as follows. It is in principle possible to make a sufficiently precise determination of the state of a sufficiently wide region of the universe at time t_0 , and sufficient laws of nature are in principle ascertainable to enable a superhuman calculator to be able to predict any event occurring within that region at an already given time t_1 .⁶

(D2.) I shall define the view that “pure chance” reigns to some extent within the universe as follows. There are some events that even a superhuman calculator could not predict, however precise his knowledge of however wide a region of the universe at some previous time.

These definitions are themselves far from being precise. What does it mean to say that “sufficient laws of nature are in principle ascertainable”? The difficulty here comes from talking of the universe as deterministic or indeterministic. A perfectly precise meaning can be given to saying that certain *theories* are deterministic or indeterministic (for example that Newtonian mechanics is deterministic, quantum mechanics indeterministic), but our talk about actual events in the world as being determined or otherwise may be little more than a reflection of our faith in prevailing types of physical theory. It may therefore be that when we apply the adjectives “deterministic” and “indeterministic” to the *universe* as opposed to *theories*, we are using these words in such a way that they have no sense. This consideration does not affect our present inquiry, however. For the believer in free will holds that *no* theory of a deterministic sort or of a pure chance sort will apply to everything in the universe: he must therefore envisage a theory of a type which is neither deterministic nor indeterministic in the senses of these words which I have specified by the two definitions *D1* and *D2*; and I shall argue that no such theory is possible.

In giving a definition of determinism in terms of predictability, moreover, I neglect K. R. Popper’s interesting demonstration (“Indeterminism in Quantum Physics and in Classical Physics,” *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, I, 117–33 and 173–95) that there is a sense in which even within classical physics some events must be unpredictable. If there are two predictors *P* and *Q*, they cannot predict one another’s behaviour. For by the definition of a predictor, small changes in *P* must lead to large changes in *Q* and *vice versa*. So in order for *P* to predict *Q* it must predict it-

self, but it cannot do this, for reasons similar to those in Ryle’s *Concept of Mind*, pages 195 and following. In particular, if the Laplacian demon is to predict the universe it cannot itself be part of the universe, nor can it interact with the universe. The notion of a Laplacian demon is thus a physically unrealisable one. However the notion of a Laplacian demon which was nonphysical and which gained information about the world without energy interchanges does seem to be a *logically* possible, though a physically impossible one, and that is enough for present purposes. In any case I do not think that the libertarian would be satisfied by the assertion that human beings have merely that sort of unpredictability in principle that mechanical predictors made of springs, weights, levers and so on might have.

In the sense of *D2* the change of state, at a certain time, of a particular atom of radium would, according to modern quantum theory, be an event of “pure chance.” It is important to distinguish “pure chance” from “chance” or “accident.” Things may happen by chance or accident in a purely deterministic universe. (More precisely, we can have a use for the words “chance” and “accident” even within a purely deterministic theory.) A man walks along the street and is hit on the head by a falling tile. This is “chance”⁷ or “accident” in the sense that it is the result of two separate causal chains, the first involving the causes of his walking along just that route at just that time, the second involving the causes of just that tile falling at just that time. There is no law which explains the event in question, as there would have been if the man had just walked under a ladder and if it had been a law of nature that men who walk under ladders get hit on the head by a falling body within the next thirty seconds. Nevertheless, though the man’s being hit on the head is a case of “chance,” Laplace’s superhuman calculator could have predicted the occurrence. It is not this sense of “chance” that I am meaning when I refer to “pure chance.”

Campbell (like Balchin and de Sade) holds that if the whole universe is deterministic in the sense of *D1*, then no one is morally responsible, for on this hypothesis if a person does a certain action “he could not have done otherwise,” and that he could have done otherwise is a condition of moral responsibility. Now there is perhaps a sense of “could not have done otherwise” in which whether or not a person could or could not have done otherwise depends on whether or not the universe is deterministic in the sense of *D1*. But it does not follow that if a person could not have done otherwise in this special sense then he could not have done otherwise in any *ordinary* sense. Taken in any ordinary sense, within some concrete context of

daily life, “he could have done otherwise” has no metaphysical implications. Does a child have to learn about Laplacian determinism before he can say that his little sister could have eaten her apple instead of his candy? Now it is the ordinary sense which we use when we talk about moral responsibility. How then can it follow that if a person “could not have done otherwise,” in the *special* sense, that he was not morally responsible?

Campbell also holds, we may feel sure, that if an action comes about by “pure chance” in the sense of *D2*, then the agent is not morally responsible. He says, for example, that “a man cannot be morally responsible for an act which does not express his own choice but is, on the contrary, attributable to chance.”⁸ It is true that a little lower down Campbell uses the word “accident,” and by “an accident” we mean “chance” in the weak sense, not “pure chance,” but this is obviously a slip of the pen. I am sure that Campbell would agree that if one of our actions happened by “pure chance” in the sense in which, according to modern physics, the change of state of a particular radium atom happens by pure chance, then this action would not be one for which we could be held *responsible*. We may therefore interpret Campbell as holding that if there is such a thing as moral responsibility then people’s actions must not always be determined in the sense of *D1*, nor must they happen by pure chance in the sense of *D2*: they must occur as the result of something else, namely “contra-causal freedom.”

The difficulty I find in the above conception is as follows. If we accept the definitions *D1* and *D2*, the following propositions are contradictories:

p: This event happened as a result of unbroken causal continuity.

q: This event happened by pure chance.

That is, *q* if and only if not *p*.

But *p* or not *p*.

So *p* or *q*, and not both not *p* and not *q*.

Therefore there is no *third* possibility outside *p* and *q*. What room, then, does logic leave for the concept of “contra-causal freedom?”

Are *D1* and *D2* good definitions of “unbroken causal continuity” and “pure chance”? Campbell might deny that they are, and up to a point I should agree with him. The notions of “causal necessity” and “chance” as used by philosophers are pretty vague, and it is to some extent uncertain just what are the rules of the game when we use these words. I want to show that there are imaginable cases which, if we adhered strictly to *D2*, we should have to call cases of pure chance, but which it would be natural to assimilate to “necessity.”

But I want also to suggest that any such imaginable cases would only lead us to revise *D1* and *D2* in *this* sense, that what was before “pure chance” would now become “unbroken causal continuity” or *vice versa*: the precise description of an intermediate possibility (a possibility which it would be natural for Campbell to call “contra-causal freedom”) must forever elude us. That is, it might be natural to redefine “unbroken causal continuity” and “pure chance” so as to redistribute possible cases between them, but logic leaves me no room for a modification of *D1* and *D2* which would allow me to slap my knee and say “Ah! *That* must be the sort of thing Campbell means by ‘contra-causal freedom.’” I shall illustrate my point by means of two examples.

(i) The universe might be such that it would be impossible for Laplace’s superhuman calculator to predict a given event *E* from a knowledge of however many laws of nature and a determination, however precise, of however wide a region of the universe, at time t_0 . Nevertheless we can conceive that he could calculate the occurrence of *E* from a knowledge of the initial conditions at two different times t_1 and t_2 , plus certain laws of nature which would clearly be of a novel type. That is, the laws of nature together with the initial conditions at t_1 would determine not a single possibility but a linear *range* of possibilities, but with a fresh cross-bearing based on conditions at t_2 we should be able to make a unique prediction. In such a universe (or perhaps better, in the case of our having such a picture of the universe) it would be natural to say that *E* was “determined.” Nevertheless according to *D1* and *D2* taken as they stand it would be a matter of “pure chance.” We might make an appropriate modification of *D1* and *D2* so that this was no longer so.

(ii) The universe might consist of two regions *A* and *B* such that from a complete knowledge of the state of *A* at time t_1 together with a complete knowledge of the state of *B* at time t_2 you could predict the occurrence of any event *E* occurring in *A* at t_2 , though from the state of the whole universe at t_1 no such prediction could be made. According to *D1* and *D2*, taken strictly, *E* would have to be said to occur by “pure chance,” but it might be natural, if such a universe (or such a type of law of nature) were more than a theoretical possibility, to remodel *D1* and *D2* so that *E* would now be said to occur “by necessity.” For I do not think that a philosopher like Campbell would be inclined to call a moral choice “free” if it could be predicted from a knowledge of a previous state of a part of the universe in which the event took place together with a knowledge of the present state of a different part of the universe.

The above two examples show how there might be formulated a novel type of natural

law which would be quasi-deterministic—that is, which would not be deterministic in the strict sense of *D1* but which nevertheless would be such that we should feel like modifying *D1* to accommodate it. (Of course if we did find it useful to formulate laws of such types we should find ourselves involved in a radical revolution in physical theory: the new physics would probably be at least as far removed from present-day physics as quantum theory is from classical physics.) But could any such case of quasi-determinism be accepted as a case of “contra-causal freedom?” Thinking of these cases may induce us to modify *D1* and *D2* so that the frontier between “necessity” and “pure chance” is moved a little one way or another, but this will not provide us with a buffer zone between the two territories.

Campbell holds that if determinism in the sense of *D1* is true then a man could never correctly be said to have been able to do otherwise than he did. That this is not so can be seen if we consider the following example. Suppose that when washing the dishes you drop a plate, but that fortunately it does not break. You say, however, that it *could* have broken. That is, within the range of possible initial conditions covered by possible cases of “dropping,” the known dispositional characteristics of the plate do not allow us to rule out the proposition “it will break.” If, however, it had been an aluminum plate, then it would not have broken. That is, whatever the initial conditions had been (within a wide range) it would not have broken. Whether dropped flat or on its edge, with a spinning motion or with no spinning motion, from three feet or four feet or five feet, it still would not have broken. Thus such cases in which we use the words “could have” or “could not have” are cases in which we either cannot or can use a law or a law-like proposition to rule out a certain possibility despite our uncertainty as to the precise initial conditions. Briefly: *E* could not have happened if there are laws or law-like propositions which rule out *E*. Campbell wants to use “could not have happened” in a different way: he will say that *E* could not have happened if *E* is ruled out by certain laws or law-like propositions *together with the initial conditions*.⁹

However it is pretty certain that Campbell would resist the suggestion that “John Smith could have done otherwise” is analogous to “the plate could have broken.” He would say¹⁰ that it is an actual particular person in a particular set of circumstances with whom we are concerned when we ask “Could he have done otherwise? Was he morally responsible?” and that we are in no way concerned with hypothetical possibilities. It is difficult to see the force of this sort of criticism. It is but a tautology to say that if we ask whether John Smith could have done otherwise then we are asking a

question about John Smith. Clearly we are interested in John Smith as an individual who has to deal with a particular situation, but what follows? That nothing follows can be made evident if we develop our example of the dropped plate. Suppose that I have a very valuable plate, made in China and once the property of some ancient emperor and the only one of its kind. While showing it to a friend I drop it but fortunately it does not break. Gasping with relief I say, “It could have broken but thank goodness it did not.” Here we are using the words “could have” and yet our interest is very much in this particular plate in this set of circumstances. There is no suggestion here, however, that a very precise determination of the initial conditions together with an exact knowledge of the physical properties of the plate would not have enabled us to predict that in these (rather fortunate) circumstances it would not break.

On this analysis “could have” implies “would have if certain conditions had been fulfilled.” In moral contexts the conditions that are of most importance are “if he had chosen,” “if he had tried,” and “if he had wanted to.” This is not to say that in some cases we may not mean more than this. J. L. Austin, in a British Academy lecture,¹¹ has recently argued that whether or no determinism be the case, it is certainly contrary to what is suggested by ordinary language and ordinary thought. For example in part of an interesting footnote he says.¹²

“Consider the case where I miss a very short putt and kick myself because I could have holed it. It is not that I should have holed it if I had tried: I did try and missed. It is not that I should have holed it if conditions had been different: that might of course be so, but I am talking about conditions as they precisely were, and asserting that I could have holed it. There’s the rub.”

To elucidate this passage compare the sentence “I could have holed it if I had tried” with the sentence “this plate could have broken if it had been colder weather.” This does not mean that it *would* have broken if had been colder weather. For a metal plate that becomes brittle due to intense cold may nevertheless be lucky in the way it falls, like the china plate in my example. When I say that I could have holed the putt (though I tried to and failed) I mean that I could have even if the *external* conditions had been precisely the same. It is surely compatible with this ordinary way of talking and I believe, like any determinist, that if the external conditions *and* the internal conditions (the state of my brain and nervous system) were precisely reproduced then my failure to hole the putt would be precisely reproduced. I cannot see, therefore, that Austin has shown that ordinary language favours indeterminism. Not that this matter is very important philosophically. Ordinary language may

well enshrine a falsehood. Austin himself clearly distinguishes between the question of whether determinism is the case and the question of whether it is implied in ordinary language. Certainly Austin's careful discussion of "can" does not help me to guess what Campbell might mean by the word, for I can deal with all of Austin's cases on the lines of my china plate example. This is not to deny the intrinsic interest in many of Austin's suggestions, such as that the "if" in "I can if I choose" is not the conditional "if" familiar to logicians but is the "if" of doubt or hesitation. (Compare: "I can, but do I choose?" "I can but whether I choose to do so or not is another question."¹³

We can now consider Campbell's phrase "genuinely open possibility." If I drop a china plate it is an open possibility that it will break. It is not an open possibility that an aluminum plate will break. The possibility of an aluminum plate breaking can be ruled out for any likely range of initial conditions from a knowledge of the physical properties of aluminum. Whether the aluminum plate is dropped on its side or on its edge, with a rotary motion or without a rotary motion, in hot weather or cold weather, from a height of two feet or six feet, it still will not break. With the china plate, in some of these cases it will break and in some not. The phrases "an open possibility" and "not an open possibility" are therefore easily understood. What about "genuinely open possibility?" We might suggest that a possibility is "genuinely open" if from the relevant laws and law-like propositions together with a determination, however precise, of the initial conditions, not even Laplace's superhuman calculator could predict what will happen. This is, by *D2*, just a case of pure chance. Once more our endeavour to describe something intermediate between determinism and pure chance has failed.

Campbell tries by introspection to distinguish "contra-causal freedom" from both "causal necessitation" and "pure chance." That is, he hopes by appealing to introspection to give a sense to "could have done otherwise" which is different from both that in (a) "the plate could have broken" and that in (b) "even if the initial conditions had been precisely the same that atom could have shot out a photon." His appeal to introspection is an appeal to our feeling that in certain situations we can do either of two alternative things. Well, in certain situations I certainly do feel that I can do either of two things. That is, I say to myself, "I can do this and I can do that." Either I say this to myself using "can" in an ordinary way (as in "the plate could break, and it could fall without breaking") or I say these words to myself using "can" in some new way. In the former case introspection has yielded no new sense of "can,"

and in the latter case some new use of "can" must already have been established. For unless this new use of "can" can be explained antecedently to such introspection, introspection will only yield the fact of my saying to myself a meaningless sentence. But, as I have already argued, logic leaves no room for such a new sense of "can."

A similar situation arises if any alternative description of the predicament of moral choice is attempted. Thus Campbell says¹⁴ that "I further find, if I ask myself just what it is I am believing when I believe that I 'can' rise to duty, that I cannot help believing that it lies with me here and now quite absolutely, which of two genuinely open possibilities I adopt." Our reply must be that we cannot say whether this is so or not. Perhaps we believe this, perhaps we do not, but we cannot tell until Campbell can explain to us what he means by "lies with me here and now quite absolutely" (as opposed to "lies with me here and now"), and until he can explain what is meant by "genuinely open possibilities" (as opposed to "open possibilities"). The same difficulty crops up¹⁵ when he appeals to "creative activity." "Granted that creative activity is possible . . .," he says. But in any ordinary sense of these words creative activity is not only possible but actual. There are poets, novelists, mathematicians, architects and inventors. In what sense of "creative activity" is it an open question whether creative activity is possible or not? Some writers again bring in the concept of "spontaneity." But you do not have to reject metaphysical determinism before you can believe that your rubbish heap burst into flames as a result of spontaneous combustion.

Most of our ordinary senses of "could have" and "could not have" are not, in my view, incompatible with determinism. Though some of our ordinary talk about moral responsibility is frequently vitiated by a confused metaphysics of free will, much of it can be salvaged.

When in a moral context we say that a man could have or could not have done something we are concerned with the ascription of responsibility. What is it to ascribe responsibility? Suppose Tommy at school does not do his homework. If the schoolmaster thinks that this is because Tommy is really very stupid, then it is silly of him to abuse Tommy, to cane him or to threaten him. This would be sensible only if it were the case that this sort of treatment made stupid boys intelligent. With the possible exception of certain nineteenth-century schoolmasters, no one has believed this. The schoolmaster says, then, that Tommy is not to blame, he just *could not* have done his homework. Now suppose that the reason why Tommy did not do his homework is that he was lazy: perhaps he had just settled down to do it when some other boy tempted him to come out and

climb a tree. In such a case the schoolmaster will hold Tommy responsible, and he will say that Tommy could have done his homework. By this he will not necessarily mean to deny that Tommy's behaviour was the outcome of heredity and environment. The case is similar to that of the plate which could have broken. The lazy boy is analogous to the china plate which could break and also could fall without breaking. The stupid boy is like the aluminum plate: whatever the initial conditions the same thing happens. If Tommy is sufficiently stupid, then it does not matter whether he is exposed to temptation or not exposed to temptation, threatened or not threatened, cajoled or not cajoled. When his negligence is found out, he is not made less likely to repeat it by threats, promises, or punishments. On the other hand, the lazy boy can be influenced in such ways. Whether he does his homework or not is perhaps solely the outcome of environment, but one part of the environment is the threatening schoolmaster.

Threats and promises, punishments and rewards, the ascription of responsibility and the nonascription of responsibility, have therefore a clear pragmatic justification which is quite consistent with a wholehearted belief in metaphysical determinism. Indeed it implies a belief that our actions are very largely determined: if everything anyone did depended only on pure chance (i.e. if it depended on nothing) then threats and punishments would be quite ineffective. But even a libertarian of course may admit that *most* of our actions are pretty well determined. (Campbell excepts only those acts which are done from a sense of duty against our inclination.)

It begins to appear that the metaphysical question of determinism is quite irrelevant to the rationality of our ascription of responsibility.

What about praise and blame? These concepts are more difficult. We must at the outset distinguish two ways in which we commonly use the word "praise." In one sense praise is the opposite of blame. We praise Tommy for his industry, blame him for his laziness. But when we praise a girl for her good looks this does not mean that we should have blamed her if her looks had been bad. When we praise one footballer for his brilliant run, we do not blame his unfortunate teammate who fumbled a pass. (Unless, of course, the fumble was due to carelessness.) When we praise Smith for his mathematical talent we do not imply that we blame Jones because, try as hard as he may, he cannot handle *x*'s and *y*'s. Of course we may well say that a girl is ugly, a footballer incompetent, or a man unmathematical, and this is the opposite of praise. But it is not blame. Praise and dispraise, in this sense, is simply grading a person as good or bad in some way. A

young philosopher may feel pleasure at being praised by one of his eminent colleagues because he thereby knows that his work is assessed highly by one who is competent to judge, and he may be pained to hear himself dispraised because he thereby knows that his work is being assessed as of poor quality. Praise and dispraise of this sort has an obvious function just as has the grading of apples.¹⁶ A highly graded apple is bought and a highly graded philosopher is appointed to a lectureship, while a low graded apple is not bought and the low graded philosopher is not appointed.

In general to praise or dispraise a man, a woman's nose, or a footballer's style is to grade it, and if the grader is competent we feel sure that there are good reasons for the grading. In practice, of course, reasons are frequently given, and this giving of reasons in itself can constitute what is called praise or dispraise. For example, if a philosopher writes about some candidate for a lectureship that he has some illuminating new ideas about the logic of certain psychological concepts, this is the sort of thing that is meant by "praise," and if he says that the candidate is muddle-headed and incapable of writing clear prose, this is the sort of thing which is meant by "dispraise." It is not the sort of thing we mean when we contrast praise with blame. To say that a man cannot write clear prose is not necessarily to blame him. He may have been brought up among muddle-headed people and always given muddle-headed books to read. The fact that we do not feel like blaming him, however, does not alter the fact that we warn prospective employers about him.

Just as we may praise or dispraise a woman for her figure, a footballer for his fleetness or slowness of foot, a lecturer in philosophy for his intelligence or lack of intelligence, and a writer for clarity or obscurity, so naturally enough, we may praise or dispraise a man for his honesty or dishonesty, truthfulness or untruthfulness, kindness or unkindness and so on. In this sense of "praise" we may praise moral qualities and moral actions in exactly the same way as we may praise beauty, intelligence, agility, or strength. Either we may do so quite generally, using a grading word like "good," "excellent," or "first-class," or we may simply give a description. (For example: her cheeks are like roses, her eyes are like stars.) Praise has a primary function and a secondary function. In its primary function it is just to tell people what people are like. To say that one candidate for a lectureship writes clear prose whereas another cannot put a decent sentence together is to help the committee to decide who should be given the lectureship. Naturally enough, therefore, we like to be praised, hate to be dispraised. And even if no actual advantage is to come from praise, we like to be praised by a competent judge

for work we have done because we take this as evidence that we have been on the right track and done something valuable. Because we come to like being praised and to hate being dispraised, praise and dispraise come to have an important secondary function. To praise a class of actions is to encourage people to do actions of that class. And utility of an action normally, but not always, corresponds to utility of praise of it.

So far I have talked of praise and dispraise, not of praise and blame. This is because I wanted a contrary for "praise" in the sense in which we can praise not only a moral action but a woman's nose. What about the contrast of praise with blame? Here I suggest that a clear-headed man will use the word "praise" just as before, and the word "blame" just like the previous "dispraise," with one proviso. This is that to praise (in this sense) or to blame a person for an action is not only to grade it (morally) but to imply that it is something for which the person is responsible, in the perfectly ordinary and non-metaphysical sense of "responsible" which we have analyzed earlier in this article. So we blame Tommy for his bad homework if this is due to laziness, not if it is due to stupidity. Blame in this sense can be just as dispassionate as dispraise of a woman's nose: it is just a grading plus an ascription of responsibility. It is perfectly compatible with a recognition that the lazy Tommy is what he is simply as a result of heredity plus environment (and perhaps pure chance).

Now most men do not, in my opinion, praise and blame people in this dispassionate and clear-headed way. This is brought out, in fact, by the quotations from de Sade and Balchin: most men do *not* feel that blame, in the way they use the word "blame," would be appropriate if a man's action was the result of heredity plus environment. The appropriateness of praise and blame is bound up, in the eyes of the ordinary man, with a notion of freewill which is quite metaphysical. Admittedly this metaphysics is incoherent and unformulated (as indeed it has to be, for when formulated it becomes self-contradictory). Nevertheless we can see that a rather pharisaical attitude to sinners and an almost equally unhealthy attitude to saints is bound up with this metaphysics in the thinking of the ordinary man if we look at the way in which very often his whole outlook and tendency to *judge* (not just to grade) other men changes when he is introduced to, and becomes convinced by, a philosophical analysis of freewill like the one in the present paper. How, again, can we explain the idea, held by so many religious people, that an omnipotent and benevolent God can *justly* condemn people to an eternity of torture? Must we not suppose that they have some confused idea that even with the same heredity and environmental influences, and quite apart from pure chance, the sinner *could* have done

otherwise? (Of course, even granting this, the utility of Hell in the eyes of a benevolent God still remains obscure.) Or consider the man who excuses himself for his indifference to his less fortunate neighbour by saying, "Hadh't he the same opportunities as I had? He could have got on if he had acted with my drive, initiative, and so forth." There is sense in such a remark only in so far as the contempt for laziness and lack of drive to which it gives expression is socially useful in spurring others on to display more drive than they otherwise would.

But a man's drive is determined by his genes and his environment, and such a remark as the one above is after all a rather unimportant part of the environment. So I do not think that the remark can be regarded as just a way of influencing people to display drive and resourcefulness. It does depend on a metaphysics of free will. After all, if everyone had the genes that make for drive and energy they could not *all* get to the top. Dog would still eat dog.

The upshot of the discussion is that we should be quite as ready to *grade* a person for his moral qualities as for his nonmoral qualities, but we should stop *judging* him. (Unless "judge" just means "grade," as in "judging apples.") Moreover, if blame in general is irrational, so must be self-blame or self-reproach, unless this comes simply to resolving to do better next time.

NOTES

1. See Paul Edwards, "Hard and soft determinism," and John Hospers, "What means this freedom?" in Sydney Hook, ed., *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science* (New York: New York University Press, 1958), pp. 104–13 and 113–30.
2. Quoted by Nigel Balchin, *The Anatomy of Villainy*, p. 174.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
4. *Treatise* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), Bk. II, Pt. iii, Sec. 1.
5. "Is 'Freewill' a Pseudo-Problem?" *Mind*, LX (1951).
6. Cf. Laplace: *Théorie Analytique des Probabilités*, second edition (Paris, 1814), p. ii of the Introduction.
7. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, 196b–97b.
8. "Is 'Freewill' a Pseudo-Problem?" p. 460.
9. For a discussion of this sort of point see F. V. Raab, "Free Will and the Ambiguity of 'Could,'" *Philosophical Review*, LXIV (1955), 60–77.
10. "Is 'Freewill' a Pseudo-Problem?" p. 453.
11. "Ifs and Cans," *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1956), pp. 109–32.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
13. These and other examples of this sort of "if" are given by Austin, "Ifs and Cans," pp. 114–15.
14. "Is 'Freewill' a Pseudo-Problem?" p. 463.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 462.
16. On the notion of grading, see J. O. Urmson's article "On Grading," in A. G. N. Flew, ed., *Logic and Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955), Second Series, pp. 159–88.