The Metaphysics of Free Will: A Reply to My Critics

John Martin Fischer

I first wish to thank Carl Ginet, Gary Watson, and Alfred Mele for their thoughtful, probing, and very generous comments. Throughout my career, I have learned a great deal from their work. Each of them has influenced me significantly, and I am very fortunate to have the benefit of their subtle, challenging, and constructive comments on my book.

I. Ginet's Comments

Ginet and I are in agreement that causal determinism would rule out alternative possibilities (of the relevant sort) and thus regulative control. (We disagree about whether moral responsibility requires regulative control: Ginet believes that it does, whereas I do not; thus Ginet is an incompatibilist about causal determinism and moral responsibility, whereas I am not. But we are putting this set of issues about moral responsibility aside in this discussion.) Not only do we agree that causal determinism is incompatible with alternative possibilities, we also agree about the soundness of the Basic Version of the argument for incompatibilism. This argument employs the highly plausible principle that Ginet dubs "Basic," which says that an agent can do X only if it is possible that his doing X be an extension of the actual past, holding the laws fixed.

So our disagreements about this part of the book are, as it were, "in the family," although I shall return later to Gary Watson's suggestion that I may not be welcome in the incompatibilist's family, even as a half-brother. I believe that the Conditional Version of the argument for incompatibilism is interestingly different from the Basic Version. In my view, a set of examples (such as that of the seadog) calls into question the Conditional Version of the Principle of the Fixity of the Past—what Ginet calls (FP)—but not the Basic Version of the principle. If I am correct, then by switching from the Conditional Version to the Basic Version, we can sidestep difficult and contentious issues and perhaps make progress toward understanding the most fundamental intuitions that drive the incompatibilist. In contrast, Ginet holds that the Basic Version entails (FP), and thus any example which poses problems for (FP) would also pose problems for Basic; if he were right, then the switch to the Basic Version of the argument for incompatibilism would not yield the progress I had hoped it would.

The key issue here is whether Ginet's (3) entails (4), that is, whether (3) It is true that, were S to do X at t, then it would have been that not-
b entails

(4) It is not the case that at t S can make it the case that (b and S does X at t). Ginet contends that (3) entails (4) because, as he puts it, "any attempt by S to make true the conjunction (b and S does X at t) would be frustrated, because S's making the second conjunct true would, if (3) is right, mean that the first conjunct would be false."

Now these are intricate and delicate issues, not easily resolvable by argumentation. I have a different take on the relationship between (3) and (4)—one which I can lay out here, although I cannot argue decisively for it. I believe that (3) does not entail (4). Let us think again about the example of the seadog. Let "do X" be "go sailing," and "b" be "the weather forecast was bad." The seadog can at noon go sailing at noon (and thus [4] is false). This is so in virtue of the existence of a possible world (which meets certain further conditions) with the same past and laws as the actual world (relative to the specification in the example) in which the seadog goes sailing at noon. The existence of such a world is entirely consistent with its being true that in the possible worlds which are closest to the actual world (relative to the specification in the example) in which the seadog goes sailing, b would not have obtained in the past. That is, (3) is true in the example whereas (4) is false, and thus (3) does not entail (4).

But what about Ginet's point that any attempt by S to make true the conjunction (b and S does X at t) would be frustrated? That is, what about the point that any attempt by the seadog to make true the conjunction (the weather forecast at 9 was bad and the seadog goes sailing at noon) would be frustrated, because the seadog's going sailing at noon would mean that the weather forecast would have been good. The nub of the dispute, in my view, concerns Ginet's claim that "any attempt" by S to make true the relevant conjunction would be frustrated. What is true is the conditional, "If S were to do X at t, then it would have been that not-b," i.e., "If the seadog were to go sailing at noon, then the weather forecast would have been good at nine." So I suppose that it might be said that if S were to attempt to make true the relevant conjunction, he would fail, i.e., if the Seadog were to attempt to make it true that (the weather forecast was bad at nine and he goes sailing at noon), then he would be frustrated. But, on my view, this does not imply that he cannot (in the relevant sense) at noon make true the conjunction (the weather forecast was bad at nine and he goes sailing at noon).

Again, this is because I believe that the conditional and the can-claim involve different modal notions. To see this, note, first, that there are cases in which it is plausible to think that an individual can do something, even though he would fail to do it, if he were to attempt to do it. An individual may genuinely be able to score well on a standardized test, but because of her anxiety about tests, it may be true that if she were to attempt to do well, she would fail. Similarly, it may be that an individual genuinely can sink a relatively short putt, and yet it may also be false that if he were to try, he would succeed. (There seem to be cases like this because there are—obviously, as any golfer knows—cases in which someone actually tries to sink a
relatively short putt and fails.) So the truth of the conditional which states that the agent would fail if she were to make the relevant attempt does not entail the falsity of the associated can-claim in these examples.

But in the example of the seadog, if it is false that if the seadog were to go sailing at noon, then the forecast would have been bad at nine, how can it be the case that the seadog can at noon make the conjunction true, i.e., make it true that (the weather forecast was bad at nine and he goes sailing at noon)? Note that there is nothing in the actual world (as given by the example) which intuitively is an obstacle to the seadog's attempting at noon to go sailing, and nothing which would block his succeeding in going sailing, if he attempts to. It follows (given other features of the example) that there is a possible world with the same past and laws as the actual world, in which nothing (obtaining at noon) that actually was an "obstacle" to the seadog's going sailing at noon or "prevented" him from going sailing at noon is removed, and in which the seadog does in fact go sailing at noon. That is, at noon the seadog has access to a possible world in which the forecast was bad at nine and yet he goes sailing at noon.

So there are indeed worlds in which the seadog's attempt to make the relevant conjunction true would not be frustrated. There are worlds genuinely accessible to the seadog—i.e., worlds with the same past and laws as the actual world and in which no intuitively freedom-undermining conditions have been deleted—in which his attempt to make true the conjunction succeeds.

On my view, then, the conditionals and the can-claims correspond to two separate modalities. The conditionals point us to the set of possible worlds which are most similar to the actual world (in which the agent acts differently). In contrast, the can-claims point us to worlds which need not be the closest or most similar possible worlds in which the agent acts differently; rather, they need only be worlds with the same past and laws, and in which no contemporaneous conditions which intuitively rule out one's freedom to do the relevant act are deleted. I believe that one can have genuine access to such worlds, quite apart from what might be the case about the pertinent conditionals. This, then, is where my dispute with Ginet lies: he seems to be assuming that the worlds relevant to the can-claims must be in the set of closest possible worlds. But if one contends that they need not be, then there is room to argue that the Basic Version of the argument for incompatibilism does not entail the Conditional Version.

Given this separation of the two modalities, I can maintain what I believe to be the most attractive view about the conditionals. That is, I can maintain that the truth of the relevant conditional does not shift with the context (in the way Ginet supposes). I find it more natural to think that whether the conditional, "If the Seadog were to go sailing at noon, the forecast would have been good at nine," does not change its truth value depending on what question we are asking. Of course, it may be contentious what the truth value is, but this is not to say that the truth value is context-relative.
Finally, I wish to say a few words about Ginet's intriguing treatment of Newcomb's Problem. He says that in a situation in which an individual believes he has only one open option, but he does not know which is that option, it is rational to deliberate as if more than one option is genuinely open. That is, Ginet believes that epistemic possibility implies that an agent ought to deliberate with the assumption of metaphysical possibility. If this is correct, then one's approach to the Newcomb puzzle in the context of an infallible predictor should be just like one's approach in the context of a merely highly reliable predictor.

But I still believe that an asymmetric approach to Newcomb's Problem is the right one: I am a one-boxer for the case of an infallible predictor, but a two-boxer for the case of a merely inerrant (or highly reliable) predictor. This is in part because I do not believe that in the relevant contexts an agent should deliberate "as if" various options are genuinely open. I am not sure exactly what it means so to deliberate, but I assume it means that one deliberates holding the belief that more than one option is genuinely available. But return to Ginet's example. I agree that it would be rational to choose going down the right corridor. But if someone were to ask me, just as I was about to choose this, "Do you believe that you are genuinely free to go down the left corridor as well?" I do not think I would be inclined to say yes. Rather, I think that I would say that I don't know whether I am free to go down the left corridor, but I certainly hope that I am not! I might put it as follows: "I reserve judgment about whether I can go down the left corridor, but I'm betting I can't."

II. Watson's Comments

In my book, I argue that causal determinism would rule out alternative possibilities, but not moral responsibility. By separating alternative possibilities from moral responsibility in this way, Watson wonders whether my incompatibility thesis is "without any teeth" or loses much of its interest. R. Jay Wallace, in a recent review of the book in the Journal of Philosophy, articulates a similar worry, saying, "If, as Fischer thinks, moral accountability only requires guidance control, the thesis that there is a different kind of control that is not compatible with determinism begins to acquire a scholastic air. Why should we care?" Interestingly, both Watson and Wallace express their reservation in terms of a worry about the "stability" of my semicompatibilism.

To answer. I begin by claiming that it is a very pervasive, deep feature of our ways of looking at ourselves as agents that we believe that we (sometimes, at least) have genuinely accessible alternative possibilities. We seem to think that we can tell that sometimes we have such possibilities. Our ways of deliberating and forming plans for the future seem to presuppose the existence of such possibilities, as do our moral principles and theories. Think, for example, of a consequentialist moral principle that enjoins one to perform that action, of the various open possibilities, that maximizes good
consequences in the long run; think, similarly, of the view that one has done
the wrong thing insofar as one failed to do something that was genuinely
available and which would have had better consequences. Similarly, our
actual practices of moral praising and blaming seem to involve the presup-
position of alternative possibilities (and hence regulative control).

I think that there is some notion of possibility—call it "free will possibil-
ity"—which plays a role in these presuppositions of common sense and in
more reflective theorizing. It is a shared notion, and yet it has proved ex-
traordinarily difficult to explicate in a generally acceptable way. In my opin-
ion, the debates about the relationship between free will—understood as
involving alternative possibilities—and causal determinism are best con-
strued as debates in which both sides share a common, intuitive notion of
freedom, but argue for different constraints on the analysis of this notion.2
So, for example, an incompatibilist will argue for a fixity of the past con-
straint on the analysis of this shared notion, whereas certain compatibilists
will not, and so forth. Of course, as Watson points out, everyone will agree
that causal determinism is incompatible with causal possibility, given the
past and laws; but it is an interesting question whether free will possibil-
ity—this shared, intuitive notion involved in claims about alternative pos-
sibilities—entails causal possibility, given the past and laws. The trick is to
try to argue that it does; and here it is difficult to produce a knockdown
argument. I have suggested that one must appeal to plausibility arguments
of various sorts.

If it does indeed turn out that free will possibility—the sort involved in
claims about genuinely accessible alternative possibilities—is incompatible
with causal determinism, then this would show that determinism's truth
would rule it out that we are the way we think we are in certain deep ways.
Since it is such a central and pervasive presupposition of common sense
and even more reflective theorizing (in ethics, decision theory, and so forth)
that we (sometimes, at least) have alternative possibilities, I think it is inter-
esting and important to learn that such alternatives are inconsistent with
causal determinism. If incompatibilism about causal determinism and al-
ternative possibilities were true and we discovered that causal determin-
ism obtains, we would have to change our natural view of ourselves in
significant ways, and we would have to restructure our ways of deliberat-
ing, planning, and evaluating ourselves and others (both rationally and
morally). So, even if moral responsibility can be saved in a deterministic world
(in which incompatibilism about determinism and alternative possibilities
is established), there would still be the need to considerably adjust our views
of ourselves.

So I think the issue of whether we have genuinely accessible alternative
pathways into the future is naturally and intrinsically interesting and con-
ected to a fabric of ways of thinking about and evaluating ourselves. It is
thus important to know whether having such paths is compatible with causal
determinism. But I agree with Watson that an incompatibilist should be
worried about accepting me into the family, even as a half-brother. For even
if I do not like to think that my incompatibilistic side has no teeth, I do admit that I am in a sense seeking to “defang” incompatibilism—to capture what is plausible about it without going all the way to incompatibilism about causal determinism and moral responsibility.

I am puzzled about the Watson/Wallace claim that my semicompatibilism is “unstable.” Rather, I think of it as capturing precisely what is powerful and attractive about traditional incompatibilism, without being forced to give up our view of ourselves as persons and morally responsible (even in a deterministic world). Making the distinction between guidance and regulative control allows one to see that the case for the incompatibility of causal determinism with one sort of freedom—that involved in regulative control—is fundamentally different from the case for the incompatibility of causal determinism with the other sort of freedom—that involved in guidance control. If the cases for these incompatibility results are importantly different, then semicompatibilism need not be unstable.

I have space only to say a few brief words about the other subtle and thoughtful comments offered by Gary Watson. As for Kant and Sinatra—and perhaps even Sid Vicious (who sings his own version of “My Way” on the soundtrack to the film, “Sid and Nancy”)—the minimal point I would want to make is that we care deeply about acting freely—we do not want our actions to be the result of direct stimulation of the brain, hypnosis, brainwashing, and so forth. In this sense, at least, we want to do it “our way.”

The project of articulating a more nuanced analysis of autonomy is difficult. But it may well be that here—as elsewhere—it must be the case that individuals consider various options at least “epistemically possible” for them. Given this assumption, Watson is correct to point to the importance of what he calls “conditional regulative control,” or the presupposition that what paths we end up taking are a function of our choices. I would contend that ascribing to agents a presupposition of a combination of the epistemic possibility of certain options and conditional regulative control can help to make sense of (or reconstruct) deliberation (and perhaps also the ideal of autonomy) in a causally deterministic world with no regulative control. It is important to emphasize that the possibilities here are epistemic, not metaphysical.

Finally, I find Watson's remarks about the distinction between historical and ahistorical theories of responsibility intriguing and suggestive. This is an issue I—and my coauthor, Mark Ravizza—explore at considerable length in our new book, to which Carl Ginet referred earlier, Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility. In this book, we argue that there is indeed a tension in Frankfurt's explicit remarks. On the one hand, he suggests in certain passages what seems to be a historical theory of responsibility. But, on the other, he explicitly insists that his theory is ahistorical. Further, although he does have an “origin” or “authorship” approach, as Watson points out, it seems that Frankfurt believes that these notions can be reduced to or explicated solely in terms of current time-slice facts. So, for example, authorship appears to be a matter of identification, for Frankfurt;
and identification is analyzed in terms of structural relationships among mental elements and also current time-slice "states"—such as the state of being satisfied in a certain way with the configuration of mental elements.

In the new book, Mark Ravizza and I develop a more refined account of guidance control. On this account, reasons-responsiveness is only one aspect of guidance control. This must be accompanied by mechanism ownership in order to yield guidance control. In other words, moral responsibility is associated with guidance control, and an individual exercises guidance control of his behavior insofar as it issues from his own, appropriately reasons-responsive mechanism. Although reasons-responsiveness can be induced by responsibility-undermining processes, these sorts of processes are typically not the agent's own. Thus, the more refined account of guidance control can deal adequately with problems of manipulation which pose insuperable difficulties for hierarchical theories such as Frankfurt's. And it provides further support for compatibilism about causal determinism and moral responsibility.

Note that our approach is historical; but, contrary to what Watson suggests, although a historical theory insists on the relevance of history, it does not thereby entail that causal determinism is the sort of history that rules out responsibility. To have a genuinely historical theory of moral responsibility, as I do, is not eo ipso to be incompatibilistic or to believe that difficult early childhood experiences (or poverty) tend to exculpate or mitigate responsibility. It is one thing to be a historical theorist—it is quite another to specify which sorts of history are responsibility-undermining.

III. Mele's Comments

In The Metaphysics of Free Will, I sought to argue that it is not plausible to ground moral responsibility in alternative possibilities. My strategy was roughly as follows. First, I noted that there are cases in which an agent seems to be morally responsible for an action, but in which he cannot perform a different action, or make a different choice (from the one he actually made). (These cases are the "Frankfurt-type" cases.) To this it may be responded that nevertheless the agent in these cases has some alternative possibility, and it is this alternative possibility which grounds his moral responsibility, if he is indeed morally responsible for his action. Against this, I contended that the examples can be constructed in such a way that only a very thin and exiguous sort of alternative possibility remains—one too delicate and insubstantial to ground moral responsibility.

So, for example, one can construct the examples (a la David Blumenfeld) so that the agent has only the alternative of involuntarily exhibiting a certain sign (say, a blush) which could be read by the counterfactual intervener and could be the basis of an intervention that would preempt any voluntary activity toward a different goal. I contended that the possibility of a mere involuntary sign—a blush—is not sufficiently robust to ground ascriptions of moral responsibility. Here I am in agreement with the liber-
tarian philosopher Robert Kane, who requires that at least some alternative pathways contain voluntary behavior for which the agent is responsible, if the actual path is to contain voluntary action for which the agent is responsible.  

How, I asked, could adding paths along which the agent does not act voluntarily (and in which the agent is not morally responsible) make it the case that the agent is morally responsible in the actual path? This seems to be a kind of alchemy—and just as incredible. Analogously, I asked, in the context of some sort of reliabilist epistemology, how could adding paths along which an agent forms false beliefs make it the case that he has knowledge in the actual world?  

My conclusion was that alternative possibilities are not the ground of moral responsibility. Mele’s careful and subtle analysis brings out an important point. As I would put it, there are two ways in which alternative possibilities might be relevant to ascriptions of moral responsibility. First, they might in themselves and directly warrant or explain the ascriptions of moral responsibility. It was my purpose in *The Metaphysics of Free Will* to deny this first claim. My point here was that mere flickers of freedom are not sufficiently robust to play the role of directly warranting ascriptions of moral responsibility.  

But Mele points out that alternative possibilities might indirectly license ascriptions of moral responsibility. This is because even the most minimal and exiguous alternative possibilities—flickers of freedom—would (if the Basic Argument for Incompatibilism, so ably articulated by such philosophers as Carl Ginet, David Wiggins, and Peter van Inwagen is sound) imply that the actual sequence is not causally deterministic. And if one believes that moral responsibility requires the lack of causal determinism in the actual sequence, then the existence of alternative possibilities of any sort would be relevant (even if indirectly) to ascriptions of moral responsibility.  

I concede that Mele is correct here. I did not mean to deny this point in my book. Rather, my strategy had two parts. First, I wanted to deny the direct relevance of alternative possibilities to moral responsibility. I thus concluded that if causal determinism were to rule out moral responsibility, it would not be in virtue of ruling out alternative possibilities. I then asked the question whether causal determinism in the actual sequence would in itself (and apart from ruling out alternative possibilities) be inconsistent with moral responsibility. I canvassed various possible reasons why someone might think that causal determinism in the actual sequence is inconsistent with moral responsibility, and I concluded that none of these reasons was decisive for me. I admitted that I did not have a knockdown argument for my conclusion, but I contended that it is plausible to think that causal determinism is consistent with moral responsibility.  

Without going into the details of the considerations I explored, I want to highlight what I take to be salient features of the general strategy. My project really was to shift the debate in what I took to be an important way.
That is, I hoped to shift the debate from questions about the relationship between determinism and alternative possibilities to issues pertaining to whether causal determinism in itself rules out moral responsibility, or, in other words, whether causal determinism in the actual sequence is a responsibility-undermining factor (apart from determinism’s cutting off alternative possibilities). I wanted to shift attention to the question of what it could be about causal determinism that would rule out moral responsibility, where the potential answers to this question would invoke solely “actual-sequence” facts.

Now I would consider it a victory if I have achieved this shift in the terms of the debate, even if I have not convinced everyone that causal determinism in the actual sequence does not constitute a responsibility-undermining factor in itself (and apart from cutting off alternative possibilities). This would be, I believe, a major shift in the terms of the debate, and an illuminating one, for I contend that moral responsibility for an action depends on the actual history of that action, and not upon the existence of genuinely available alternative possibilities.

I now turn to the particular actual-sequence explanation for the putative incompatibility of causal determinism and moral responsibility suggested by Mele (on behalf of a weak libertarian). A weak libertarian holds that causal determinism is consistent with a kind of freedom sufficiently robust to ground moral responsibility, but nevertheless is inconsistent with a more robust (and desirable) form of freedom. If causal determinism were true, then it would follow that an agent would not have the ability to make an explanatory contribution to some of his actions, the making of which cannot be fully explained by the laws of nature and the state of the world at some time prior to his having any sense of the apparent options. This actual-sequence fact, according to Mele, might motivate a weak libertarian to say that causal determinism rules out a desirable form of freedom—one worth wanting.

Why exactly might one want this sort of freedom? Why exactly would it be reasonable to want it to be the case that one sometimes makes an explanatory contribution to some of one’s actions, the making of which cannot be fully explained by the laws of nature and a prior state of the world? Mele here allows a libertarian—Robert Kane—to speak for himself: “What determinism takes away is a certain sense of the importance of oneself as an individual. If I am ultimately responsible for certain occurrences in the universe, ... then my choices and my life take on an importance that is missing if I do not have such responsibility.”

Mele is careful not necessarily to endorse Kane’s view here, but he wishes to put it forward as not obviously confused or wrong. Reasonable people might connect determinism to a diminution in their status or importance, and thus want to have the ability to make the relevant sort of explanatory contribution to their actions. Reasonable people, then, may want a sort of freedom inconsistent with causal determinism.

I confess that I do not have the inclination to think that the truth of
causal determinism would make human beings less "important as individuals" or in any way diminish the meaningfulness of our lives. But I also do not know how I could argue for this view. Fortunately, I do not feel any need to do so. I am perfectly content to allow room for weak libertarianism. That is, I have no strong objection to the view that, although causal determinism is consistent with a freedom sufficiently robust to ground moral responsibility (this would presumably be an actual-sequence sort of freedom), causal determinism is inconsistent with another sort of freedom, which it is not unreasonable to want. Let a thousand flowers bloom.

But be careful about weeds! Mele goes on to suggest that perhaps a hard libertarian can also get "significant mileage out of some flickers of freedom, given the indeterminism that those flickers require." The argument here (by the hard libertarian) would be that alternative possibilities (even mere flickers of freedom) are necessary for moral responsibility insofar as indeterminism in the actual sequence is necessary for the sort of freedom that can ground moral responsibility. So the flickers of freedom point us indirectly to moral responsibility via actual-sequence indeterminism.

Mele suggests that this strategy is open to the hard libertarian, but he does not endorse it. Indeed, he says that he is "no fan" of hard libertarianism, and he wonders whether we should be convinced by the hard libertarian move. Allow me to offer some considerations in favor of resisting hard libertarianism.

A major engine driving my overall approach to moral responsibility is the view that our most basic and fundamental views of ourselves as persons and morally responsible agents should not be "held hostage" to the possible truth of an empirical doctrine such as causal determinism. That is, I believe that our view of ourselves as persons, and as morally responsible agents, should not depend on whether or not the doctrine of causal determinism is true. So, for example, if a consortium of scientists from Cal Tech, MIT, and Stanford were to announce tomorrow that causal determinism is indeed true, and if over the years we came to accept this, I do not believe that we should therefore need to change our view of ourselves as persons and morally responsible agents. The truth of causal determinism is not the sort of thing that should issue in changes of this sort—our personhood and moral responsibility should not be that tenous.

This, then, motivates me to find an account of moral responsibility that is consistent with causal determinism. (By the way, it also motivates me to find such an account that is consistent with indeterminism. For if we were convinced beyond a doubt that indeterminism were true, this would also not be the sort of thing that should [in itself] force us to change our view of ourselves as persons and morally responsible agents. Note that the approximation to an account of moral responsibility offered in *The Metaphysics of Free Will*—and the more detailed positive account developed in *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility*—are consistent with both causal determinism and indeterminism.) I admit that our views of ourselves as persons and morally responsible agents can legitimately be held hostage
to certain empirical discoveries, but my intuition is that these basic views of ourselves should not depend on the kind of empirical doctrine of which causal determinism and indeterminism are instances.

I don’t know how to argue for this basic intuition, but if I am right about it, then this provides a reason to resist hard libertarianism. Perhaps some find it reasonable to want to make an explanatory contribution to some of one’s actions, the making of which is not fully explained by the laws of nature and past states of the universe. But it is also reasonable to want our personhood and moral responsibility not to hang by a thread—not to be held hostage to the possible truth of a doctrine such as causal determinism. Given my doubts about the contentions that causal determinism would somehow erode our importance as individuals or the meaningfulness of our lives, and given my very strong commitment to the idea that our views of ourselves as persons and morally responsible agents should not depend on the falsity (or the truth) of causal determinism, I for one am not convinced by hard libertarianism. Even if it is in some sense reasonable to have a desire that the actual sequence be indeterministic, one’s other reasonable desires should lead one (on balance) to resist hard libertarianism.

Notes


2 This view—the idea that compatibilists and incompatibilists have a shared subject matter—is difficult to argue for decisively. I believe that it is a plausible view, and that it is important. Of course I do not deny that there are different notions of freedom, and different “senses” of freedom. But my contention here is that when we are talking about the sort of freedom that involves alternative possibilities, and that plays a certain role in our commonsense theorizing about moral responsibility, we do share a common subject matter, and are disagreeing about its analysis. But at least I would suggest that those who contend that compatibilists and incompatibilists are talking employing different “senses” of freedom should give some evidence for their view; frequently it is simply asserted without argument that compatibilists and incompatibilists are “talking past each other.” It seems much more natural to me to suppose that we all have in mind some inchoate notion of genuine alternative possibilities about which we are disagreeing.

